Imprimatur,

Guil. Sill, R.P.D. *Henr. Epiſc.*
Lond. à Sac. Dom.

Novemb. 2.
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SERMONS

PREACH'D

Upon ſeveral Occaſions.

By *JOHN TILLOTSON*, D.D.
Dean of *Canterbury*, Preacher to the Honourable Society of *Lincolns-Inn*, and one of His Majeſties Chaplains in Ordinary.

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The Second Volume.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

LONDON,
Printed for *Edw. Gellibrand*, and are to be Sold by Henry Bonwicke, at the *Red-Lyon* in St. *Paul's*-Church-Yard, 1678.

SERMON I.

Isaiah IX. 12, 13, *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: For the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.*

SERMON II.

Heb. III. 13, *Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

SERMON III.

1 Cor. III. 15, *But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire.*

SERMON IV.

Pſal. CXIX. 156, *Great peace have they that love thy Law, and nothing ſhall offend them.*

SERMON V.

Pſal. CXIX. 59, *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.*

SERMON VI.

Pſal. CXIX. 60, *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments.*

SERMON VII.

1 John III. 10, *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.*

SERMON VIII.

Luke XV. 7, *I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in Heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance.*

SERMON IX.

Matth. IX. 31, 32, *Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall*

ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: But whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

SERMON X.

Acts X. 38.——*Who went about doing good.*

A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

June 30th 1667.

Iſa. IX. 12, 13.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.

IN the former part of this 12th *verſe*, the *Prophet* threatens that *Iſrael* ſhould be brought into great diſtreſs, and ſet upon by Enemies on every ſide, *the Syrians before, and the Philiſtines behind*; and that they ſhould *devour Iſrael with open mouth:* And though this was like to be a very ſore and dreadful Judgment, yet he foretells that this would not ſtay Gods hand, nor ſatisfie his anger, becauſe he foreſaw that they would ſtill grow worſe, and continue impenitent.

 For

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill: For the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.

In which words there are theſe *two* things, very uſeful at all times, but at this time eſpecially moſt proper and ſeaſonable for our conſideration.

1. *The deſign and intention of God in ſending Judgments upon a People*; and that is, *to reclaim them from their ſins*, imply'd in theſe words, *For the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them*; which intimate to us, that this is the end which God aims at in his Judgments, to take us off from our ſins, and to bring us to himſelf.

2. The reaſon of the continuance of Gods Judgments; becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them. And this is fully expreſs'd in the *Text*, that therefore *Gods anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe the people turneth not unto him that ſmiteth them*, &c.

Of theſe *Two* I crave leave to ſpeak as plainly and briefly as I can.

I. *The deſign and intention of God in ſending*

ſending Judgments upon a people; And that is *to reclaim them from their ſins.* This indeed is the intention of all Gods diſpenſations towards us in this World. The end of all his mercies and benefits, is to take us off from ſin, and to oblige and win us to our duty: So the *Apoſtle* tells us *Rom.* 2. 4. That the deſign of Gods *goodneſs, and long-ſuffering, and forbearance towards us*, is, *to lead us to Repentance.*

And this is the way wherein God delights to deal with us. The way of Judgment and ſeverity is that which he is more averſe from, a courſe which he unwillingly takes with us, and not without ſome difficulty and reluctancy, *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men:* And were it not that we are ſuch perverſe Creatures as not to be wrought upon by kindneſs, ſo wild as not to be tamed by gentle uſage, God would not handle us in any other way. It is our obſtinacy and intractableneſs to the methods of his goodneſs which conſtraineth, and almoſt forceth him againſt his inclination, to take the Rod into his hand, and to chaſtiſe us with it. He would draw us with *the cords of love*, and *the bands of a man*,

(as he expreſſeth himſelf in the *Prophet*), but we will not follow him: And therefore we provoke him to turn theſe Cords into whips, and to change the gentle methods of his kindneſs into ways of harſhneſs and ſeverity.

And yet when he comes to take this courſe with us, he ſtill, like a kind and tender-hearted Father, aims at our benefit and advantage. He deſigns kindneſs to the ſons of men by all thoſe judgments which do not kill them, and cut them off from the opportunity and poſſibility of improving them. If he ſend Evils upon us, it is that thereby he may do us ſome greater good: If he afflict us, it is not becauſe it is pleaſant to him to deal harſhly with us, but becauſe it is profitable and neceſſary for us to be ſo dealt withall: And if at any time he imbitter our lives by miſeries and ſufferings, it is becauſe he is loth to ſee us periſh in pleaſant ways, and chuſeth rather to be ſomewhat ſevere towards us, than ſuffer us to be utterly undone.

This *Moſes* declares to have been the great end of all the ſevere Providences of God towards the People of *Iſrael*, in their long wandring in the Wilderneſs, and all the difficulties and hardſhips they

they were there exerciſed withall for the ſpace of forty years, *Deut.*8.15,16: *Who led thee through that great and terrible Wilderneſs, wherein were fiery Serpents and Scorpions*, &c. *That he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.*

So that the afflicting providences of God are not only apt in their own nature to do us good, but which is a more expreſs argument of the Divine goodneſs, God intends and aims at this end by them: He does not ſend Judgments upon this Theatre of the World for his ſport and paſtime, nor ſet on one part of his Creation to bait another for his own diverſion: He does not, like ſome of the cruel *Roman* Emperours, take pleaſure to exerciſe men with dangers, and to ſee them play bloody prizes before him.

Nay, he does nothing that is ſevere out of humour and paſſion, as our earthly Parents many times do. Indeed he is angry with us for our ſins; but yet ſo as ſtill to pity our perſons: And when his Providence makes uſe of any ſharp and cutting inſtruments, it is with this merciful deſign, to let out our corruption: If he caſt us into the

 Furnace

Furnace of affliction, it is that he may refine and purifie us from our droſs.

So that though the Judgments of God be Evils in themſelves, yet conſidering the intention of God in them, they are no real objections againſt his goodneſs, but rather arguments for it; as will appear if we conſider theſe *three* things.

1. That the Judgments of God are proper for the cure of a far greater Evil of another kind.

2. They are proper for the prevention of far greater Evils of the ſame kind.

3. They are not only proper to theſe Ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.

Firſt, *The Judgments of God are very proper for the cure of a far greater Evil of another kind*; I mean the *Evil of ſin*. We take wrong meaſures of things, when we judg thoſe to be the greateſt Evils which afflict our bodies, wound our reputation, and impoveriſh our Eſtates. For thoſe certainly are far the greateſt, which affect our nobleſt Part; which vitiate our underſtandings, and deprave our wills, and wound and defile our ſouls. What corrupt humours are to the body, that ſin is to the ſouls of men,

men, their diſeaſe and their death.

Now it is very agreeable with the goodneſs and mercy of the Divine providence, to adminiſter to us whatever is proper for the cure of ſo great an evil. If we make our ſelves ſick, that is our own folly, and no fault of the Phyſitian; but we are beholden to him if he recover us, though it be by very bitter and unpleaſing means. All temporal Judgments which are ſhort of Death, are properly Medicinal; and if we will but ſuffer them to have their kindly operation upon us, they will work a cure; and how grievous and diſtaſtful ſoever they may be for the preſent, they will prove mercies and bleſſings in the iſſue. Upon this account *David* reckons afflictions among the happy bleſſings of his life, *Pſal.* 119. 72, *It is good for me* (ſaies he) *that I have been afflicted*; And he gives the reaſon of it in the ſame *Pſalm*, ver. 67, *Before I was afflicted I went aſtray, but now have I learn'd thy precepts.*

So that though all afflictions are Evils in themſelves, yet they are good for us; becauſe they diſcover to us our diſeaſe, and tend to our cure: They are a ſenſible argument and conviction to us of

of the evil and danger of ſin. We are commonly ſuch *fools* as *Solomon* ſpeaks of, who *make a mock of ſin*; and like Children, will be playing with the edge of it till it cut and wound us: We are not ſufficiently ſenſible how great an evil it is, till we come to feel the diſmal effects and conſequences of it. And therefore to rectify our apprehenſions concerning it, God makes us to ſuffer by it. Thus *Elihu* deſcribes to us the happy effect of afflictions upon ſinners, *Job* 36. 8, 9, 10, *If they be bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction, then God ſheweth them their work, and their tranſgreſſion that they have exceeded. He openeth alſo their ear to diſcipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity.* God doth but invite and entreat us by his mercies, but his Judgments have a more powerful and commandng voice. *When he holds men in cords of affliction, then he openeth their ear to diſcipline.* In our proſperity we are many times incapable of counſel and inſtruction; but when we are under Gods correcting hand, then are we fit to be ſpoken withall.

Secondly, The Judgments of God are likewiſe *proper for the preventing of far greater*

greater evils of the ſame kind; I mean farther puniſhments. In ſending of temporal Judgments upon ſinners, God uſually proceeds with them by degrees: Firſt he lets flye ſeveral ſingle ſhots at them, and if upon theſe they will take warning and come in, they may prevent the broad-ſides and volleys of his wrath.

But the great advantage of all is, that temporal Judgments may prove to us the opportunities of preventing the miſerable and unſpeakable torments of a long Eternity. For all Judgments which are not final, leaving men a ſpace of Repentance, have in them the mercy of Reprieve, which by a ſerious and timely return to God, may be improv'd into a Pardon.

Beſides, that adverſity and afflictions do uſually diſpoſe men, and put them into a fit temper for Repentance; They fix our minds, and make us ſerious, and are apt to awaken us to conſideration, and ſuggeſt to us ſuch thoughts and meditations as theſe: If temporal evils be ſo grievous, how inſupportable then will be the extreme and endleſs torments of the next life? If in this day of Gods grace and patience we ſometimes meet

with

with ſuch ſeverity, what may we not look for in the day of vengeance? If theſe drops of Gods wrath which now and then fall upon ſinners in this world, fill them with ſo much anguiſh and affliction, how deplorably miſerable will thoſe wretches be upon whom the ſtorms of his fury ſhall fall? Who would venture to continue in ſin, when the greateſt miſeries and calamities which we feel in this life, are but a ſmall and inconſiderable earneſt of thoſe woful wages which ſinners ſhall receive in the Day of Recompences?

Thirdly, The Judgments of God are *not only proper to theſe Ends, but in many caſes very neceſſary.* Our condition many times is ſuch, as to require this ſevere way of proceeding, becauſe no other courſe that God hath taken, or can take with us, will probably do us good. God does not delight in the miſeries and calamities of his Creatures, but we put him upon theſe extremities; or rather his own goodneſs and wiſdom together, do prompt and direct him to theſe harſh and rigorous ways. May be we have brought our ſelves into that dangerous ſtate, and the malignity of our diſtemper is ſuch, that it is not to be remov'd without

without violent Phyſick; and that cannot be adminiſtred to us without making us deadly ſick.

So that the Judgments of God which are many times *abroad in the earth*, are nothing elſe but the wiſe Methods which the great Phyſitian of the World uſes for the cure of Mankind; They are the Rods of his School, and the Diſcipline of his Providence, that *the inhabitants of the world may learn righteouſneſs*: They are a merciful invention of Heaven, to do men that good which many times nothing elſe will; and to work that bleſſed effect upon us, which neither the wiſe counſels and admonitions of Gods Word, nor his milder and gentler dealings with us can uſually attain.

Thus we find in the *Parable*, Luk. 15. that the Providence of God makes uſe of hunger and extreme neceſſity to bring home the *Prodigal*; and by him our Saviour repreſents to us the temper of moſt ſinners: For till we have ſpent that ſtock of mercies which God hath given us, till we come to be pinch'd with want, and are *ready to periſh*, we are not apt to entertain thoughts of *returning to our Father*.

It may be there are ſome ſinners which are more tractable and eaſie to be reduced to goodneſs, that are not ſo headſtrong and obſtinate in their way, but that they may be reclaimed by milder and ſofter means: But there are likewiſe a great many ſenſleſs and outragious ſinners, who are madly and furiouſly bent upon their own ruin: Now to treat theſe fairly, with the allurements of kindneſs, and the gentle arts of perſwaſion, would be to no purpoſe: The only way that is left of dealing with them, is rigour and ſeverity. When ſinners are thus beſides themſelves, ſome thing that looks like Cruelty is perhaps the greateſt mercy that can be ſhown to them; nothing ſo proper for ſuch perſons as a dark Room, and a ſpare Diet, and ſevere Uſage; *A Rod for the back of Fools*, as the *Wiſe-man* ſpeaks.

Thus have I done with the *firſt* thing I propounded to ſpeak to, *namely*, *The merciful deſign and intention of God in ſending Judgments upon a People*, which is, to bring them to Repentance, and by Repentance to prevent their Ruin. I proceed to the

II. *The Reaſon of the continuance of Gods*

Gods Judgments, viz. becauſe the people were not reclaimed by them; therefore *his anger is not turned away, but* his hand is ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe *the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.*

And how can it be expected it ſhould be otherwiſe; When incorrigibleneſs under the Judgments of God is a provocation of ſo high a nature, a ſign of a moſt deprav'd and incorrigible temper, and an argument of the greateſt obſtinacy in evil? Upon this account we find that the Holy *Spirit* of God in *Scripture* brands *Ahaz* as a ſingular and remarkable ſort of ſinner, (2 *Chron.* 28. 22.) becauſe, *in the time of his diſtreſs he ſinned yet more againſt the Lord.* The longer *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians* reſiſted the Judgments of God, the more ſtill they were harden'd, and the more they were plagu'd: *Levit.* 26. 23, after God had there threatned his people with ſeveral ſore Judgments for their ſins, he tells them, that if they *will not be reform'd by all theſe things*, he will *puniſh them ſeven times more*, and after that, *ſeven times more for their ſins:* And if in ſuch a caſe the juſt God will puniſh ſeven times more, we may ſafely conclude,

clude that ſins after Judgments are ſeven times greater.

So likewiſe, *Deut.*28, after a long and dreadful Catalogue of Curſes there denounc'd againſt the people of *Iſrael* in caſe of their diſobedience, God at laſt threatens them with a Forreign *Enemy*, that ſhould *diſtreſs them in their gates*; And if they would not be reclaim'd by all this, he tells them, That he hath ſtill more and greater Judgments for them in ſtore, *v.* 58, and 59, *If thou wilt not obſerve to do all the words of this law, that thou mayeſt fear this great and glorious Name*, THE LORD THY GOD, *then the Lord will make thy Plagues wonderful.* If we be of ſo ſtrange and monſtrous a diſpoſition, as to grow worſe under Judgments, God will deal with us after an unuſual and prodigious manner, he will make our *plagues wonderful.*

This incorrigible temper the *Prophets* of old every where make the great aggravation of the ſin of *Iſrael*, Iſa.1.4,5, *Ah ſinful Nation! a people laden with iniquity*; and after a great many other expreſſions to ſet forth what heinous ſinners they were, he ſums up all in this, That they were ſo far from being reform'd by the ſeveral Judgments of God which had

been inflicted upon them, that they were the worſe for correction; *Why ſhould they be ſtricken any more? they will revolt more and more.* So likewiſe, *Hoſ.* 7. 9, 10, *Ephraim*, though brought very low, is repreſented as of the ſame refractory temper, *Strangers have devour'd his ſtrength*, &c. *But they do not return to the Lord, nor ſeek him for all this.* I will mention but one *Text* more (and methinks it bears but too near a reſemblance with our own condition, both in reſpect of the judgments which have been upon us, and our carriage under them,) *Amos* 4. where God upbraids his people ſeveral times with this, as the great aggravation of their ſins, That they continued impenitent under all thoſe terrible Judgments of God which had been upon them; *I have ſent among you* (ſays he) *Famine*; and then *Peſtilence*; and then the *Sword*; and laſt of all a terrible *Fire* which had almoſt utterly conſumed them, *verſ.* 11. *I have overthrown ſome of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand pluckt out of the burning: yet have*

ye not return'd unto me. And becauſe all theſe Judgments had not been effectual to reclaim them, He tells them that he was reſolved to go on in puniſhing; and therefore he bids them to expect it, and prepare themſelves for it, *verſ.* 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael; and becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Iſrael.* When God hath begun to puniſh a people, and they are not amended by it, the honour of his Juſtice is concern'd to proceed, and not to give over. By every ſin that we commit, we offend God; but if he ſmite us, and we ſtand out againſt him, then do we contend with him, and ſtrive for maſtery. And when the ſinner is upon theſe ſtubborn and inſolent terms, then *prepare to meet thy God*; A bitter *Sarcaſme*, as if man could be a match for God, and a poor weak creature in any wiſe able to encounter him to whom Power belongs. There's a ſevere expreſſion concerning Gods dealing with ſuch perverſe and obſtinate ſinners, *Pſal.* 18. 26. *With the froward thou wilt ſhew thy ſelf*

froward, or, as the words may more properly and conveniently be render'd, *with the froward thou wilt wreſtle.* God will not be outbrav'd by the ſins of men; and therefore if we continue impenitent we have all the reaſon in the world to expect that God will go on to puniſh.

But to come nearer to our ſelves, and to conſider our own caſe; which is in truth ſo very bad that we may almoſt be afraid to conſider it. The wiſe and good God, like a prudent and indulgent Father, hath uſed all the arts of his Providence towards this Nation, to reclaim us. He hath invited us to him by many bleſſings, but we would not come; ſo that (to borrow an apt illuſtration from a great Divine of our own) we have forced him to deal with us as *Abſalom* did with *Joab*; he ſent one civil meſſage to him after another; but he would not come; at laſt he ſets on fire his Corn-field to try whether that would bring him: This courſe God hath taken with us; we would not be perſwaded by meſ-

Biſhop *Sanderſon.*

 ſages

ſages of kindneſs (by his many bleſſings and favours) to return to him, and therefore hath he ſent amongſt us the terrible meſſengers of his wrath. Firſt we were engag'd in a *Foreign War*; and though God was pleas'd to give us ſome conſiderable ſucceſs in it, yet it ſeems our provocations were ſo great, that he was reſolv'd to puniſh us. He was loth to let us *fall into the hands of men*; and therefore he took the work into his own hand, and puniſh'd us himſelf, by ſending *a Peſtilence* amongſt us, the ſoreſt and moſt deſtructive that hath befallen this Nation for many Ages. But we did not upon this, return to him; and therefore his fierce anger kindled a fearful *Fire* amongſt us, which hath laid the honour of our Nation, one of the greateſt and richeſt Cities in the World in the duſt; and that by ſo ſudden and irreſiſtible, ſo diſmal and amazing a devaſtation as, in all the circumſtances of it is, ſcarce to be parallel'd in any Hiſtory.

I doubt not but moſt of us were mightily affected with this Judgment whilſt

whilſt it was upon us. So aſtoniſhing a calamity, could not but make us open our eyes a little, and awaken us to conſideration; Even the *rich-man* in the *Goſpel*, though he had all his life-time been immers'd in ſenſuality, yet could not but *lift up his eyes when he was in Flames.*

And ſurely God expects, that ſuch Judgments as theſe ſhould not only rouze us a little for the preſent, but that they ſhould have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a thorough and laſting reformation amongſt us; but yet I am afraid that this dreadful Fire hath had no other influence upon us, but what it uſes to have upon Metals, which are only melted by it for the preſent, but when the Fire is removed, they ſuddenly cool and return to their former hardneſs.

One would have thought, that the ſenſe of ſuch a calamity as this, ſhould have remain'd longer upon us. Methinks God ſeem'd to ſay to us after this Judgment as he did once to *Je-*

 ruſalem,

ruſalem, Zeph. 3. 7, *Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive inſtruction*; but we (like them) have been but the more forward to provoke him, (*they roſe early and corrupted their doings*) we have after all this *harden'd our hearts from his fear, and refuſed to return.* And therefore God is now come to one of his laſt Judgments, *Our Enemy diſtreſſeth us in our Gates.* God hath begun to *let us fall into the hands of men*, and by giving our Enemies a ſudden and fatal advantage upon us, hath ſmitten us with *a Breach great as the Sea.*

Theſe were terrible calamities indeed to come ſo thick and ſo ſwiftly upon us, *like deſolation, and as a whirlwind.* Such a quick ſucceſſion of Judgments, treading almoſt upon one anothers heels, does but too plainly declare that God is highly incens'd againſt us. For ſurely theſe are not the wounds of a Friend, but the terrible aſſaults of an Enemy. They do not look like the diſpleaſure of a Father, but the ſeverity of a Judg; not like *viſitation*, but like *vengeance.*

And

And beſides theſe more viſible Judgments upon the Nation, we are by a ſecret curſe of God inſenſibly decayed in our riches and ſtrength. We are, I know not how, ſtrangely impoveriſht in the midſt of plenty, and almoſt undone by victories. And which adds to our miſery, few among us ſeem to be ſufficiently ſenſible of it, or to take any notice by what ſilent ſteps and imperceptible degrees (like gray hairs and the infirmities of old age) poverty and weakneſs are ſtealing in upon us; ſo that we may fitly apply to our ſelves, what the *Prophet* ſays of *Ephraim*, *Hoſ.* 7. 9, *Strangers have devoured his ſtrength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, and yet he knoweth it not.*

And our condition, as we are a *Church*, is not much better. How is this famous *Proteſtant Church* of ours, which was once the admiration of her Friends, and the envy of her Enemies, ſunk and declin'd in her glory, and reduc'd into a very narrow compaſs? So that ſhe is *left* like *the*

Daughter of Sion, (*Iſa.* 1. 8.) *as a Cottage in a Vineyard, as a Lodge in a garden of Cucumbers, as a beſieged City*; ſtraitned and hem'd in on all parts, by the impudence of *Atheiſm*, the inſolencies of *Popery*, and the turbulency of *Faction*; all which do every day viſibly and apace gain ground upon her, and diſtreſs her on every ſide; juſt as the condition of the *Jewiſh* Church is deſcrib'd before my Text, *The Syrians before, and the Philiſtines behind, both ready to devour Iſrael with open mouth.*

And ſurely it is not for nothing that God hath brought us thus low, that he hath ſent all theſe Judgments upon us, and that he doth ſtill threaten us with more: The reaſon is plain, becauſe we are ſtill impenitent; *the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them.* There hath been almoſt an univerſal degeneracy amongſt us, and there is ſtill, I fear, a general impenitency, *the people turneth not*, &c. Notwithſtanding all thoſe diſmal Calamities which our eyes have ſeen, wickedneſs doth ſtill prevail in the Nation, and overflows it like a mighty

mighty Deluge; ſo as to overſpread all Ranks and Orders of men: And not only ſo, but is grown impudent, and appears *with a whores forehead*; all kind of modeſty ſeems to have forſaken the ſinners of this Age.

And is this Repentance? to live in filthy and abominable luſts, to teare the Name of God by horrid Oaths and Imprecations; to be Atheiſtical and prophane, and by an unexampled boldneſs to turn the *Word of God* it ſelf, and the graveſt and moſt ſerious matters of Religion into *Raillery?* This is not *to turn to him that ſmiteth us*, but to turn upon him and ſmite him again. And yet ſuch crying and clamorous ſins as theſe, are almoſt come to be the garb and faſhion of the Nation, and to be aecounted the wit and gallantry of the Age.

And *Shall not God viſit for theſe things? ſhall not his ſoul be aveng'd on ſuch a Nation as this?* Yes, he hath viſited; and 'tis for theſe things that *the wrath of God* hath been ſo manifeſtly *revealed from Heaven* againſt

gainſt us. For this cauſe, *miſery and deſtruction* have been *in our ways, and the way of peace have we not known*, becauſe there hath been *no fear of God before our eyes.* Hence it is, that *God's anger is not turned away, but his hand is ſtretched out ſtill, becauſe the people turneth not to him that ſmiteth them, neither do they ſeek the Lord of Hoſts.*

But do not we *ſeek God?* Do we not every day acknowledg our ſins to him, and pray that he would *have mercy upon us miſerable offenders*, and *grant, that we may hereafter live godly, righteous and ſober lives?* Do not we *ſeek the Lord of Hoſts*, when we continually beg of him to ſave and *deliver us from the hand of our enemies?* Indeed we do thus *ſeek* him, but we ſhould firſt *turn to him*; otherwiſe, if we hope our prayers will prevail with God to do us good, we do but *truſt in lying words.* If we go on in our ſins, our very prayers will *become ſin*, and encreaſe our guilt: For *the prayer of the wicked* (that is, of one that is reſolv'd to continue ſo) *is an abomination to the Lord.*

Lord. Can we think it reaſonable for men to addreſs themſelves to God after this manner? *Lord, though we have no mind to turn to thee, yet we pray thee turn away thine anger from us; though we are reſolv'd not to forſake our ſins, yet we make no doubt but that thy mercy will forgive them: Give peace in our time, O Lord, that we may purſue our luſts ſecurely and without diſturbance: Deliver us, we pray thee, from the hands of our Enemies, that we may ſin againſt thee without fear all the days of our lives.* Would it not be horrible impudence and impiety to put up any ſuch petitions to God? And yet this, I fear, is the moſt genuine interpretation of our prayers and lives compar'd together.

And if this be our caſe, what can we expect? God may give us peace with our Enemies, but then he will find out ſome other way to puniſh us: For if we ſtill perſiſt in our Atheiſm and Prophaneneſs, in our contempt of God and of his holy Worſhip, in our ſcorn and deriſion of Religion, in our abominable luſts and horrid

horrid impieties, what can we look for, but that God ſhould *be angry with us until he have conſum'd us, and there be no eſcaping*? Nothing can be a ſadder preſage of our ruin, than not to be reform'd by thoſe dreadful judgments of God which have been upon us. This was that which brought final deſtruction upon the *Egyptians* in the *Red Sea*, that they had held out ſo obſtinately againſt ſo many Judgments, and had been *hardned under ten Plagues*. To be impenitent after ſuch ſevere corrections, is to poyſon our ſelves with that which is intended for our Phyſick, and by a *miraculous* kind of obſtinacy to turn the *Rods* of God into *Serpents*.

And now perhaps ſome will be apt to ſay, That theſe are things fit for men of our *Profeſſion*, becauſe it is our Trade and we live by it. Indeed they are ſo, things very fit to be ſaid, and withall very fit for every one to conſider, who profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian, and who owns the belief of a God, and a Providence, and another World. And if they be ſo, where is the fault? Is it,

that

that there is a peculiar Profeſſion of men whoſe proper work it is to tell men of their faults, and to perſwade them to reform? No, there is no harm in that neither. Is it then that they live by their Profeſſion, and yet would be believed? Yes, there lies the force of the objection. To which I ſhall only at preſent return this anſwer, That men do not argue thus in other caſes, where yet the reaſon ſeems to be the very ſame. In matters that concern their *Bodies* and *Eſtates*, the *Phyſitian* and the *Lawyer* are believ'd, though it is verily thought that they live by their Profeſſions as well as we; why then ſhould men deal ſo partially and unequally only with their *Souls*? Were we not mov'd by better principles, and ſway'd by the arguments and conſiderations of another World, we might, for ought we know, with every whit as much advantage to our ſelves, ſuffer men to be quiet, and to ſleep on ſecurely in their ſins; If we did not believe our ſelves in theſe matters, what ſhould hinder, but that we might with as much

gravity

gravity and confidence cry *Peace, Peace, when there is no Peace*, and flatter men with as much art, and with as good a grace as any of thoſe can do, who *live delicately, and wear ſoft clothing?*

But *we believe* the threatnings of God, and *therefore do we ſpeak: We know the terrour of the Lord*, and therefore we endeavour to *perſwade men.* And O! that we could perſwade them to *break off their ſins by righteouſneſs*, and to *turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in his hands:* And then, *who can tell but God may turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we periſh not.*

The good God make us all wiſe, to know in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes; and grant that we may all turn to him that hath ſmitten us, by Repentance and real Reformation of our lives; that God may be pleas'd to

turn

turn away his Anger from us, and to ſtretch out his hand for our Deliverance; which we humbly beg of him for the ſake of Chriſt. To whom with the Father, &c.

A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

IN

LENT,

1671.

Heb. III. 13.

Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

AMong the many conſiderations which the Word of God and our own Reaſon offer to us to diſcourage us from ſin this is none of the leaſt conſiderable, that he that once engages in a vicious courſe is in danger to proceed in it, being inſenſibly trained on from one degree of wickedneſs to another: ſo that the farther he advanceth, his retreat grows more difficult, becauſe he is ſtill puſhed on with a greater violence. All errour, as well of practiſe as of judgment, is endleſs; and when a man is once out of the way, the farther he ſhall go on the harder he

will find it to return into the right way. Therefore there is great reaſon why men ſhould be often cautioned againſt the beginnings of ſin: or if they have been ſo unhappy as to be engaged in a bad courſe, why they ſhould be warned to break it off preſently and without delay, leſt by degrees they be hardened in their wickedneſs, till their caſe grow deſperate and paſt remedy. And to this purpoſe is the *Apoſtles* advice here in the *Text*; *Exhort one another daily while it is called to day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

From which words I ſhall

1. Endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin; and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil courſe.

2. I ſhall from this conſideration take occaſion to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger; and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. And then

3. I ſhall apply my ſelf to the duty here in the Text, of *exhorting* men with all earneſtneſs and importunity to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; or if they be already

ready entred upon a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; *leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

I. *Firſt*, I ſhall endeavour to repreſent to you the growing danger of ſin; and by what ſteps and degrees bad habits do inſenſibly gain upon men, and harden them in an evil courſe. All the actions of men which are not natural, but proceed from deliberation and choice, have ſomething of difficulty in them, when we begin to practiſe them; becauſe at firſt we are rude and unexerciſed in that way: but after we have practiſed them awhile, they become more eaſie: And when they are eaſie, we begin to take pleaſure in them: And when they pleaſe us, we do them frequently, and think we cannot repeat them too often: And by frequency of acts a thing grows into a habit: And a confirmed habit is a ſecond kind of Nature: And ſo far as any thing is natural, ſo far it is neceſſary, and we can hardly do otherwiſe; nay, we do it many times when we do not think of it. For by vertue of a habit, a mans mind or body becomes pliable and enclined to ſuch kind of actions as it is ac-

 cuſtomed

cuſtomed to, and does as it were ſtand bent and charged ſuch a way; ſo that being touched and awakened by the leaſt occaſion it breaks forth into ſuch or ſuch actions. And this is the natural progreſs of all habits indifferently conſidered, whether they be good or bad.

But vicious habits have a greater advantage, and are of a quicker growth. For the corrupt nature of a man is a rank ſoil, to which vice takes eaſily, and wherein it thrives apace. The mind of man hath need to be prepared for piety and virtue; it muſt be cultivated to that end, and ordered with great care and pains: But vices are weeds that grow wild and ſpring up of themſelves. They are in ſome ſort natural to the ſoil, and therefore they need not to be planted and watered, 'tis ſufficient if they be neglected and let alone. So that vice having this advantage from our nature, it is no wonder if occaſion and temptation eaſily draw it forth.

But that we may take a more diſtinct account of the progreſs of ſin, and by what ſteps vice gains upon men, I ſhall mark out to you ſome of the chief and more obſervable gradations of it.

1. Men

1. Men begin with leſſer ſins. No man is perfectly wicked on the ſudden. *Sunt quædam vitiorum elementa; there are certain rudiments of vice,* in which men are firſt entered, and then they proceed by degrees to greater and fouler crimes. For ſin hath its infancy and tender age, and its ſeveral ſtates of growth. Men are not ſo totally degenerate but at firſt they are aſhamed when they venture upon a known ſin, though it be but ſmall in compariſon. Hence it is that at firſt men are very ſollicitous to palliate and hide their faults by excuſes; but after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too viſible to be concealed, then they will attempt to defend and maintain them; and from thence they come by degrees to take pleaſure in them, and in thoſe that do the ſame things. *Juven.*

2. After men have been ſome time initiated in theſe leſſer ſins, by the commiſſion of theſe they are prepared and diſpoſed for greater: ſuch as lay waſte the conſcience, and offer more violence to the light and reaſon of their minds. By degrees a ſinner may grow to be ſo hardy as to attempt thoſe crimes which at firſt he could not have had the thought

of committing without horrour. Like *Hazael*, who when he was told by the Prophet *Eliſha* what barbarous cruelties he ſhould one day be guilty of towards the people of *Iſrael*, when he ſhould come to be King of *Syria*, he abominated the very thought and mention of them; *Is thy ſervant a dog that he ſhould do this great thing?* and yet, for all this, we know he did it afterward. 'Tis true indeed when a ſinner is firſt tempted to the commiſſion of a more groſs and notorious ſin, his conſcience is apt to boggle and ſtart at it, he doth it with great difficulty and regret; the terrours of his own mind, and the fears of damnation, are very troubleſome to him: But this trouble wears off by degrees; and that which at firſt was difficult, does by frequent practice and long cuſtome become tolerable.

3. When a man hath proceeded thus far, he begins to put off ſhame, one of the greateſt reſtraints from ſin which God hath laid upon humane nature. And when this curb once falls off, there is then but little left to reſtrain and hold us in. At firſt ſetting out upon a vicious courſe men are a little nice and delicate, like young Travellers, who at firſt are offend

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ed at every ſpeck of dirt that lights upon them; but after they have been accuſtomed to it, and have travelled a good while in foulways, it ceaſeth to be troubleſome to them to be daſhed and beſpatter'd.

4. After this, it is poſſible, men may come to approve their vices. For if mens judgments do not command their Wills and reſtrain their luſts it is great odds but in proceſs of time the vicious inclinations of their Wills will put a falſe byaſs upon their judgments: And then it is no wonder if men come to boaſt of their ſins, and to glory in their vices, when they are half perſwaded that they are generous and commendable qualities. Thus much is certain in experience, that ſome men have gotten ſo perfect a habit of ſome ſins, as not to know and take notice many times when they commit them: As in the caſe of ſwearing, which ſome men have ſo accuſtomed themſelves to, that without any conſideration they do of courſe put an oath or two into every ſentence that comes from them. And it hath been obſerved of ſome perſons that they have told an untruth ſo often, and averr'd it with ſo much confidence, till at laſt, forgetting that it was a lie at

firſt,

firſt, they themſelves have in proceſs of time believed it to be true.

5. From this pitch of wickedneſs men commonly proceed to draw in others, and to make proſelytes to their vices. Now this ſignifies not only a great approbation of ſin, but even a fondneſs for it, when men are not content to ſin upon their own ſingle accounts, but they muſt turn zealous agents and factors for the Devil; become *teachers* of ſin and *miniſters of unrighteouſneſs*, and are factiouſly concerned to propagate together with their Atheiſtical principles their lewd practices, and to draw followers and Diſciples after them.

And when they are arrived to this height, it is natural for them to hate reproof, and to reſiſt the means of their recovery; to quarrel againſt all the remedies that ſhall be offered to them, and to count thoſe their greateſt enemies who have ſo much courage and kindneſs as to deal plainly with them, and to tell them the truth. And then all the wiſe counſels of Gods Word, and the moſt gentle and prudent admonitions in the world, when they are tendered to ſuch perſons, ſerve only to provoke their ſcorn or their paſſion. And ſurely that man is in a ſad

caſe,

caſe, that is ſo diſpoſed that in all probability he will turn the moſt effectual means of his amendment into the occaſion of new and greater ſins.

But that which renders the condition of ſuch perſons much more ſad and deplorable is, that all this while God is withdrawing his grace from them. For every degree of ſin cauſeth the Holy Spirit of God with all his bleſſed motions and aſſiſtances to retire farther from them: And not only ſo, but the Devil (that evil *Spirit* which the *Scripture* tells us, *works effectually in the children of diſobedience*) does according as men improve in wickedneſs, get a greater and a more eſtabliſh'd dominion over them. For as they who are reclaimed from an evil courſe, are ſaid in *Scripture* to be *reſcued out of the ſnare of the Devil*, and to be *turned from the power of Satan unto God*; So, on the other hand, the farther men advance in the ways of ſin, ſo much the farther they depart from God, from under the influences of his grace, and the care of his protection and providence; and they give the Devil, (who is not apt to neglect his advantages upon them) greater opportunities every day to gain the firmer poſſeſſion of them.

And

And thus, by paſſing from one degree of ſin to another, the ſinner becomes hardened in his wickedneſs, and does inſenſibly ſlide into that ſtate in which without a miraculous grace of God he is like for ever to continue. For the mind of man, after it hath been long accuſtomed to evil, and is once grown old in vice, is almoſt as hard to be rectified, as it is to recover a body bowed down with age to its firſt ſtreightneſs. The *Scripture* ſpeaks of ſome that *commit ſin with greedineſs*, and *that drink up iniquity as the Oxe drinketh up water*, with a mighty appetite and thirſt, as if they were not able to refrain from it. And to expreſs to us the miſerable condition of ſuch perſons, it repreſenteth them as perfect ſlaves to their vices, that have *ſold* themſelves to do wickedneſs, and *are led captive by Satan at his pleaſure*. And when men have brought themſelves to this paſs, they are almoſt under a fatal neceſſity of ſinning on. I do not believe that God hath abſolutely predeſtinated any man to ruin; but by a long courſe of wilful ſins men may in a ſort predeſtinate themſelves to it, and chooſe wickedneſs ſo long till it almoſt become neceſſary; and till they have brought themſelves under all imaginable

diſadvantages of contributing any thing towards their own recovery; being bound in the chains of their own wickedneſs, and held in the cords of their ſins: Nay, like *Sampſon*, not only bound by thoſe luſts which they have embraced, but likewiſe robbed of all their ſtrength whereby they ſhould break looſe from thoſe bonds. God grant that none of us may ever have the woful experience of it: But I am horribly afraid it is too true, that a ſinner may arrive to that confirmed ſtate of impiety as almoſt totally to loſe his liberty to do better: He may attain to that perfection in vice, as to continue to be a bad man upon the ſame account that the *Hiſtorian* extravagantly ſays *Cato* was virtuous, *Vell. Patere.*

quia aliter eſſe non potuit; becauſe he could not be otherwiſe. Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots? It is the *Scripture* compariſon to ſet forth to us how hard a thing it is for a man to be brought to goodneſs, that hath been long accuſtomed to do evil. He that is thus deeply engaged and entangled in a bad courſe, will ſcarce ever have the heart and reſolution to break looſe from it, unleſs he be forced violently out of it by ſome ſevere affliction, by a ſharp ſickneſs,

or

or by a terrible calamity, or by the preſent apprehenſions of death and the terrours of a future Judgment. Nor will theſe be effectual neither to change ſuch a perſon, without an extraordinary degree of Gods grace; which, conſidering the greatneſs and the continuance of his provocations, he hath very little reaſon to expect or hope God ſhould ever beſtow upon him. Wretched man! that haſt brought thy ſelf into this miſerable ſtate, out of which there is but juſt a poſſibility left of thy being reſcued: that haſt neglected thy diſeaſe ſo long, till it is almoſt too late to apply remedies: that haſt provoked God ſo far, and ſinned to ſuch a prodigious height, that thou haſt reaſon almoſt to deſpair both of his grace and aſſiſtance for thy repentance, and of his mercy for thy pardon. I ſpeak not this to diſcourage even the greateſt of ſinners from repentance. Though their caſe be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite deſperate. For *thoſe things which ſeem impoſſible with men, are poſſible with God.* But I ſpeak it on purpoſe to ſtop ſinners in their courſe; and to diſcourage men from going on in ſin till they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of it; and have

brought

brought themſelves by inſenſible degrees, into that dangerous and difficult ſtate which I have all this while been repreſenting to you. I come now to the

II. *Second* thing I propounded, which was; from this conſideration to ſhew what great reaſon and need there is to warn men of this danger; and to endeavour to reſcue them out of it. The *Apoſtle* directs this precept to all Chriſtians. *Exhort one another daily, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* That is, leſt you be hardened by degrees, and be finally ruined. Aud ſurely, every man is concerned to do what in him lies to reſcue his brother from ſo imminent a danger; It is every ones place and duty to endeavour to ſave thoſe whom he ſees ready to periſh: Much more does it concern thoſe who are peculiarly ſet apart for this work; I mean, the Miniſters of Gods holy Word; whoſe proper office and buſineſs it is to *exhort* and *warn every man day and night*; who are *ſet as watchmen to the houſe of Iſrael*; and *whoſe blood*, in caſe any of them miſcarry through our neglect, *ſhall be required at our hands.* So that if we believe the threatnings of God,

God, which we declare to others; if we have any apprehenſion of the dreadful miſery of another world; if we have any ſenſe of our own duty and ſafety; if we have any pity for periſhing ſouls, we cannot but be very importunate with ſinners to look about them, and to conſider their danger, and to bethink themſelves ſeriouſly of the miſerable event and iſſue of a wicked life: We cannot but be earneſt with them to *break off their ſins, and to give glory to God by repentance, before darkneſs come, and their feet ſtumble upon the dark mountains.* When we are convinced more fully than we can deſire, that *miſery and deſtruction are in their ways*; when we plainly ſee the *evil day* haſting toward them a-pace, and *deſtruction coming upon them like a whirlwind*; heaven above threatning them, and *hell beneath moving her ſelf to meet them at their coming*, can we poſſiby do leſs than to warn ſuch perſons to *flee from the wrath which is to come*, and out of a ſad apprehenſion of the danger that hangs over them, to caution them againſt it, and endeavour with all our might to reſcue them from the miſery which is ready to ſwallow them up? Indeed one would be apt to think it a very vain thing

to

to diſſwade men from being miſerable; to uſe great vehemency of argument to hinder a man from leaping into a pit, or from running into the fire; to take great pains to argue a ſick man into a deſire of health, and to make a priſoner contented to have his ſhackles knocked off, and to be ſet at liberty; one would think all this were perfectly needleſs: But yet we ſee in experience ſin is a thing of ſo ſtupifying a nature, as to make men inſenſible of their danger, although it be ſo near, and ſo terrible. It is not ſo with men in other caſes: When we labour of any bodily diſtemper, it is much to find a man that is patient of his diſeaſe; but when our ſouls are mortally ſick, that we ſhould be contented with our condition, and fond of our diſeaſe, that we ſhould fight with our Phyſitian, and ſpurn at our remedy; this ſurely is the height of diſtraction, for men to be thus abſolutely bent upon their own ruin, and to reſolve to make away themſelves forever. And we who are the Meſſengers of God to men, muſt be born of the rocks, and have hearts *harder than the nether milſtone*, if we can patiently look on and endure to ſee men periſh, without uſing our utmoſt endeavour to ſave them. Therefore I ſhall in the

III. *Third* and *laſt* place apply my ſelf to this work of *Exhortation*, the duty commanded here in the Text. And here I ſhall addreſs my ſelf to *two* ſorts of perſons.

1. To perſwade thoſe who are yet innocent of great crimes, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin, leſt it gain upon them by degrees.

2. To preſs and urge thoſe that are already entered upon a wicked courſe, that they would make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate; *leſt*, at laſt, *they be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

1. To perſwade thoſe who are yet in ſome meaſure innocent, to reſiſt the beginnings of ſin leſt it gain upon them by degrees. Vice may eaſily be diſcouraged at firſt. 'Tis like a ſlight diſeaſe; which is eaſie to be cured, but dangerous to be neglected. The firſt approaches of ſin and temptation are uſually very modeſt; but if they be not diſcountenanced they will ſoon grow upon us, and make bolder attempts. Every inclination to ſin, every compliance with temptation is a going down the hill: While we keep our ſtanding we may command our ſelves; but if we once put our

ſelves

ſelves into violent motion downward, we cannot ſtop when we pleaſe.

Omne in præcipiti vitium ſtetit——

All Vice ſtands upon a Precipice; and to engage in any ſinful courſe, is to run down the hill. And if we once let looſe the propenſions of our nature, we cannot gather in the reins and govern them as we pleaſe: If we give way to *preſumptuous ſins*, they will quickly get *dominion over us*. It is much eaſier not to begin a bad courſe, than to put a ſtop to our ſelves after we have begun it. *Stulta res eſt nequitiæ modus*. 'Tis a fond thing for a man to think to ſet bounds to himſelf in any thing that is bad; to reſolve to ſin in number, weight and meaſure, with great temperance and diſcretion, and government of himſelf: That he will commit this ſin, and then give over; entertain but this one temptation, and after that he will ſhut the door and admit of no more. Our corrupt hearts when they are once in motion, they are like the raging ſea, to which we ſet no bounds, nor ſay to it *hitherto thou ſhalt go and no further*. Sin is very cunning and deceitful, and does ſtrangely gain upon Seneca.

men when they once give way to it. It is of a very bewitching nature, and hath ſtrange arts of addreſs and inſinuation: The giving way to a ſmall ſin does marvellouſly prepare and diſpoſe a man for a greater: By giving way to one little vice after another, the ſtrongeſt reſolution may be broken. For though it be not to be ſnapt in ſunder at once, yet by this means it is untwiſted by degrees, and then 'tis eaſie to break it one thread after another. 'Tis ſcarce imaginable of what force one ſinful action is to produce more: For ſin is very teeming and fruitful; and though there be no *bleſſing* annext to it, yet it does ſtrangely *encreaſe and multiply*. As there is a connexion of one virtue with another, ſo vices are linkt together, and one ſin draws many after it. When the Devil tempts a man to commit any wickedneſs, he does as it were lay a long train of ſins; and if the firſt temptation take, they give fire to one another. Let us then reſiſt the beginnings of ſin; becauſe then we have moſt power, and ſin hath leaſt. This is the *firſt*.

2. To perſwade thoſe who are already engaged in a wicked courſe, to make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate. And there is no other way to get out of it but by repentance;

pentance; that is, by a real change and reformation of our lives; for herein the nature of true repentance does consist. And without this all the devices which men use, to get rid of the guilt of their sins, are vain and to no purpose. 'Tis not to be done by a formal confession and absolution, nor by a long pilgrimage, nor by one of those little Tickets from *Rome*, which they call *Indulgences*. A wise man would much sooner perswade himself that God would not at all punish the sins of men, than that he would forgive them so easily, and receive great offenders to favour upon such slight terms. Let us not deceive our selves; there is one plain way to Heaven, *viz.* sincere repentance, and a holy life; and there is no getting thither by tricks. And without this change of our lives, all our sorrow, and fasting, and humiliation for sin, which at this season we make profession of, will signifie nothing. There is an excellent passage of the Son of *Syrach* to this purpose, *Eccles.* 34. 25, 26, *He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? so is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things, who will hear his prayer, or*

what doth his humbling profit him? There is this plain difference between trouble for ſin and repentance; ſorrow only reſpects ſins paſt, but repentance is chiefly preventive of ſins for the future: And God therefore requires that we ſhould be troubled for our ſins, that we may reſolve to leave them.

And to oblige us to a vigorous and ſpeedy reſolution in this matter, let us conſider that we have engaged too far already in a bad courſe; and that every day our retreat will grow more dangerous and difficult; that by our delays we make work for a ſadder and longer repentance, than that which we do now ſo ſtudiouſly decline: Let us conſider likewiſe, that our life is concerned in the caſe; that *except we repent and turn, we ſhall die*; and that the evil day may overtake us, while we are deliberating whether we ſhould avoid it or not: that vice is ſo far from being mortified by age, that by every days continuance in it we encreaſe the power of it; and ſo much ſtrength as we add to our diſeaſe, we certainly take from our ſelves: And this is a double weakning of us, when we do not only loſe our own ſtrength, but the enemy gets it, and imploys it againſt us. The deceit-

ceitfulneſs of ſin appears in nothing more than in keeping men off from this neceſſary work, and perſwading them to hazard all upon the unreaſonable hopes of the mercy of God, and the uncertain reſolution of a future repentance. I do not think there are any here but do either believe, or at leaſt are vehemently afraid that there is another life after this; and that a wicked life, without repentance, muſt unavoidably make them miſerable in another world; and that to caſt off all to a death-bed repentance, puts things upon a mighty hazard. And they have a great deal of reaſon to think ſo: For alas, how unfit are moſt men at ſuch a time for ſo great and ſerious a work as repentance is, when they are unfit for the ſmalleſt matters: And how hard is it for any man, then to be aſſured of the truth and reality of his repentance, when there is no ſufficient opportunity to make trial of the ſincerity of it. I deny not the poſſibility of the thing; but it is much to be feared that the repentance of a dying ſinner is uſually but like the ſorrow of a malefactor when he is ready to be turned off; he is not troubled that he hath offended the Law, but he is troubled that he muſt die. For when death is ready to

ſeiſe upon the ſinner, and he feels himſelf dropping into deſtruction, no wonder if then the mans ſtomack come down, and he be contented to be ſaved; and ſeeing he muſt ſtay no longer in this world, be deſirous to go to Heaven rather than Hell; and in order to that, be ready to give ſome teſtimonies of his repentance: no wonder if when the rack is before him, this extort confeſſion from him; and if in hopes of a pardon he make many large promiſes of amendment, and freely declare his reſolurion of a new and better life. But then it is the hardeſt thing in the world to judg, whether any thing of all this that is done, under ſo great a fear and force, be real. For a ſick man as he hath loſt his appetite to the moſt pleaſant meats and drinks, ſo likewiſe his ſinful pleaſures and fleſhly luſts are at the ſame time nauſeous to him; and for the very ſame reaſon: For ſickneſs having altered the temper of his body, he hath not at that time any guſt or reliſh for theſe things. And now he is reſolved againſt ſin, juſt as a man that hath no ſtomach is reſolved againſt meat. But if the fit were over, and death would but raiſe his ſiege, and remove his quarters a little farther from him, it is to be

feared

feared that his former appetite would ſoon return to him, and that he would ſin with the ſame eagerneſs he did before. Beſides, how can we expect that God ſhould accept of his repentance at ſuch a time; when we are conſcious to our ſelves, that we did reſolve to put off our repentance till we could ſin no longer. Can we think it fit for any man to ſay thus to God in a dying hour; "Lord, now the "world leaves me, I come to thee. I "pray thee give me eternal life, who "could never afford to give thee one good "day of my life: Grant that I may live "with thee, and enjoy thee for ever, who "could never endure to think upon thee. "I muſt confeſs that I could never be per-"ſwaded to leave my ſins out of love to "thee, but now I repent of them for fear "of thee: I am conſcious to my ſelf that "I would never do any thing for thy ſake; "but yet I hope thy goodneſs is ſuch, that "thou wilt forgive all the ungodlineſs and "unrighteouſneſs of my life, and accept "of this forced ſubmiſſion which I now "make to thee. I pray thee do not at "laſt fruſtrate and diſappoint me in this "deſign which I have laid, of ſinning "while I live, and getting to heaven when "I die. Surely no man can think it fit

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to ſay thus to God; and yet I am afraid this is the true interpretation of many a mans repentance who hath defer'd it till he comes to die. I do not ſpeak this to diſcourage repentance even at that time. It is always the beſt thing we can do. But I would by all means diſcourage men from putting off ſo neceſſary a work till then. 'Tis true indeed when 'tis come to this, and a ſinner finds himſelf going out of the world, if he have been ſo fooliſh and ſo cruel to himſelf, as to put things upon this laſt hazard; repentance is now the only thing that is left for him to do; this is his laſt remedy, and the only refuge he has to fly to: And this is that which the Miniſter in this caſe ought by all means to put the man upon, and earneſtly to perſwade him to. But when we ſpeak to men in other circumſtances, that are well and in health, we dare not for all the world encourage them to venture their ſouls upon ſuch an uncertainty. For to ſpeak the beſt of it, it is a very dangerous remedy; eſpecially when men have deſignedly contrived to rob God of the ſervice of their beſt days, and to put him off with a few unprofitable ſighs and tears at the hour of death. I deſire to have as large apprehenſions of the mercy of God as any man; but withall

withall, I am very ſure that he is the hardeſt to be impoſed upon of any one in the world. And no man that hath any worthy apprehenſions of the Deity, can imagine him to be ſo eaſie, as to forgive men upon the laſt word and intimation of their minds; and to have ſuch a fondneſs for offenders as would reflect upon the prudence of any Magiſtrate and Governour upon earth. God grant that I may ſincerely endeavour to live a holy and virtuous life; and may have the comfort of that when I come to die: And that I may never be ſo unwiſe as to venture all my hopes of a bleſſed eternity upon a death-bed repentance.

I will conclude all with thoſe excellent ſayings of the Son of *Syrach*, (Eccleſ. 5. 6, 7. 16. 11, 12, 18. 21, 22, *Say not, Gods mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the multitude of my ſins. For mercy and wrath is with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out diſpleaſure: And as his mercy is great, ſo are his corrections alſo. Therefore make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: For ſuddenly ſhall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy ſecurity thou ſhalt be deſtroyed. Humble thy*

ſelf

ſelf before thou be ſick, and in the time of ſins ſhew repentance. Let nothing hinder thee to pay thy vows in due time, and defer not till death to be juſtified.

A SER-

A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

WHITE-HALL,

In *April* 1672.

1 Cor. III. 15.

But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire.

THE Context is thus. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wiſe Maſter-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jeſus Chriſt. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, ſilver, precious ſtones, wood, hay, ſtubble, every mans work ſhall be made manifeſt, for the day ſhall declare it; becauſe it ſhall be revealed by fire, and the fire ſhall try every mans work of what ſort it is. If any mans work abide which he hath built thereupon, he ſhall receive a reward. If any mans work ſhall be burnt, he ſhall ſuffer loſs; But he himſelf ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire.* In

In these Words the Apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of *Christianity*, but built upon it such *doctrines* or *practices* as would not bear the *trial*; which he expresses to us by *wood*, *hay*, and *stubble*, which are not *proof* against the *fire*. Such a person, the Apostle tells us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not absolutely deny the possibility of his salvation; *He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

That by *fire* here, is not meant the fire of *Purgatory*, as some pretend (who would be glad of any shadow of a Text of Scripture to countenance their own dreams) I shall neither trouble you nor my self to manifest; since the *particle* of similitude [ὡς] plainly shews, that the Apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire *literally*, but such an escape as men make out of a house or Town that is on fire. Especially since very learned persons of the Church of *Rome* do acknowledg, that *Purgatory* cannot be concluded from this *Text*; nay, all that *Estius* contends for from this *place* is, that it cannot be concluded from hence, that there is no *Purgatory*; which we never pretended, but only that this Text does not prove it.

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It is very well known, that this is a Proverbial phraſe, uſed not only in Scripture, but in prophane Authors, to ſignifie *a narrow eſcape out of a great danger.* He ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by fire, διὰ πυρὸς, *out of the fire.* Juſt as δι' ὕδατος is uſed 1 *Pet.* 3. 20. where the Apoſtle ſpeaking of the eight perſons of *Noah*'s family, who eſcap'd the flood, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος, they eſcaped *out of the water.* So here this phraſe is to be rendred in the Text, *he himſelf ſhall eſcape, yet ſo as out of the fire.* The like expreſſion you have, *Amos* 4. 11, *I have pluckt them as a firebrand out of the fire.* And *Jude* 23, *Others ſave with fear, plucking them out of the fire.* All which expreſſions ſignifie the greatneſs of the danger, and the difficulty of eſcaping it; *as one who when his houſe at midnight is ſet on fire, and being ſuddenly wak'd, leaps out of his bed, and runs naked out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along with him, but imploying his whole care to ſave his body from the flames,* as St. Chryſoſtome *upon another occaſion expreſſeth it.* And ſo the *Roman* Orator * (who, it is likely did not think of *Purgatory*) uſeth this phraſe; *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit*; From which Judgment or Sen-

* *Tully.*

tence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. And one of the *Greek* * *Aristides* Orators * tells us, That *to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech.*

From the words thus explained, the Observation that naturally ariseth is this, *That men may hold all the Fundamentals of Christian Religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their salvation.* What those things were, which some among the *Corinthians* built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endanger'd their Salvation, we may probably conjecture, by what the Apostle reproves in this Epistle, as the tolerating of *incestuous marriages*, communicating in *Idol-feasts*, &c. And especially by the doctrine of the false Apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian Churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this Epistle. And what their *Doctrine* was, we have an account *Act.* 15. *viz.* that they imposed upon the *Gentile* Christians, *Circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish Law*, teaching, that *unless they were circumcised, and kept the Law of Moses, they could not be saved.* So that they did not only build these Doctrines upon *Christi-*

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anity, but they made them equal with the *Foundation*, ſaying, that *unleſs men believed and practiſed ſuch things, they could not be ſaved.*

In ſpeaking to this *Obſervation*, I ſhall reduce my diſcourſe to theſe two Heads.

1. I ſhall repreſent to you ſome *Doctrines* and *Practices* which have been built upon the *Foundation* of *Chriſtianity*, to the great hazard and danger of mens *ſalvation*. And to be plain, I mean particularly by the Church of *Rome*.

2. I ſhall enquire, whether our granting a *poſſibility* of ſalvation (though with great hazard) to thoſe in the communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a reaſonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himſelf to that Church.

And there is the more reaſon to conſider theſe things, when ſo many *ſeducing Spirits* are ſo active and buſie to pervert men from the *truth*; and when we ſee every day ſo many and their *Religion* ſo eaſily parted. For this reaſon theſe two Conſiderations ſhall be the ſubject of the following Diſcourſe.

I. *Firſt*, We will conſider ſome *Doctrines* and *Practices* which the Church of *Rome* hath built upon the *foundation* of

 Chriſti-

Christianity, to the great hazard and danger of mens *salvation*. It is not denied by the most judicious *Protestants*, but that the Church of *Rome* do hold all the Articles of the Christian Faith which are necessary to salvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a just ground of our separation from them, is, *the imposing of new Doctrines and Practices upon Christians, as necessary to salvation*, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his Apostles; and which are either directly contrary to the Doctrine of Christianity, or too apparently destructive of a good life. And I begin,

1. With their *Doctrines*. And, because I have no mind to aggravate lesser matters, I will single out four or five points of Doctrine, which they have added to the Christian Religion, and which were neither taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor own'd in the first ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they please to bring in, is, their *Doctrine of Infallibility*. And this they are very stiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themselves, where this *Infallibility* is seated; whether

whether in *the Pope alone*, or a *Council alone*, or *in both together*, or in *the diffuſive body of Chriſtians*. But they are ſure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice againſt it? can any man think, that this *priviledg* was at firſt conferred upon the Church of *Rome*, and that Chriſtians in all Ages did believe it, and had conſtant recourſe to it, for determining their differences, and yet that that very Church, which hath enjoyed and uſed it ſo long, ſhould now be at a loſs where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there ſhould be ſuch differences among them, about that which they pretend to be the onely means of ending all differences.

There is not the leaſt intimation in Scripture of this *priviledg* confer'd upon the *Roman* Church; nor do the Apoſtles, in all their Epiſtles, ever ſo much as give the leaſt direction to Chriſtians to appeal to the Biſhop of *Rome* for a determination of the many differences, which even in thoſe times happen'd among them. And it is ſtrange they ſhould be ſo ſilent in this matter, when there were ſo many *occaſions* to ſpeak of it, if our Saviour had

 plainly

plainly appointed ſuch an *infallible Judg* of controverſies, for this very end, to decide the differences that ſhould happen among Chriſtians. It is ſtrange, that the *ancient Fathers* in their diſputes with Hereticks, ſhould never appeal to this *Judg*; nay, it is ſtrange they ſhould not conſtantly do it, in all caſes, it being ſo ſhort and expedite a way for the ending of controverſies. And this very conſideration to a wiſe man is inſtead of a thouſand arguments, to ſatisfie him that in thoſe times no ſuch thing was believed in the world.

Now this *Doctrine of Infallibility*, if it be not true, is of ſo much the more pernicious conſequence to Chriſtianity, becauſe the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it, in all their other errors; and gives them a pretence of aſſuming an Authority to themſelves, to impoſe their own fancies and miſtakes upon the whole Chriſtian world.

2. Their *Doctrine* about *Repentance*; Which conſiſts in confeſſing their ſins to the Prieſt; which if it be but accompanied with any degree of *contrition*, does upon *abſolution* received from the Prieſt put them into a ſtate of *ſalvation*, though they have lived the moſt lewd and debauched lives

lives that can be imagin'd; than which nothing can be more plainly deſtructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the moſt wicked man runs of his ſalvation, is only the danger of ſo *ſudden a death* as gives him no ſpace for confeſſion and abſolution. A caſe that happens ſo rarely, that any man that is ſtrongly addicted to his luſts, will be content to venture his ſalvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very inſignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remiſſion of ſins may be had upon ſuch cheap terms.

3. The *Doctrine of Purgatory*; By which they mean a ſtate of temporary puniſhments after this life, from which men may be releaſed, and tranſlated into Heaven, by the prayers of the living, and the ſacrifice of the *Maſs*. That this Doctrine was not known in the primitive Church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgment of as learned and eminent men as any of that Church; which is to acknowledg that it is a ſuperſtructure upon the Chriſtian Religion. And though in one ſenſe, it be indeed a building of *gold* and *ſilver* upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, conſidering the vaſt

 revenues

revenues which this Doctrine (and that of *Indulgences*, which depends upon it) brings into that Church; yet I doubt not, but in the Apoſtles ſenſe, it will be found to be *hay* and *ſtubble*. But how groundleſs ſoever it be, it is too gainful a Doctrine to be eaſily parted withall.

4. The *Doctrine* of *Tranſubſtantiation*. A hard *word*, but I would to God that were the worſt of it; the *thing* is much more difficult. I have taken ſome pains to conſider other Religions that have been in the world, and I muſt freely declare, that I never yet, in any of them, met with any Article or Propoſition, impoſed upon the belief of men, half ſo unreaſonable and hard to be believed as this is: And yet this, in the *Romiſh* Church, is eſteemed one of the moſt principal Articles of the Chriſtian Faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in Scripture, than for our Saviours being ſubſtantially changed into all thoſe things which are ſaid of him, as that he is a *rock*, a *vine*, a *door*, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This Doctrine hath not only *no certain Foundation* in Scripture, but I have a far heavier charge againſt it, namely, that it undermines the very

very foundation of Chriſtianity it ſelf. And ſurely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the *Chriſtian Doctrine*, which deſtroys the *reaſon* of our belief of the whole. And that this Doctrine does ſo, will appear evidently, if we conſider what was the main argument which the Apoſtles uſed to convince the world of the *truth of Chriſtianity*; and that was this, *That our bleſſed Saviour, the Author of this Doctrine, wrought ſuch and ſuch miracles, and particularly that he roſe again from the dead:* And this they proved, becauſe they were eye-witneſſes of his miracles, and had ſeen him and converſed with him after he was riſen from the dead. But what if their ſenſes did deceive them in this matter? then it cannot be denied, but that the main proof of Chriſtianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now ſuppoſe (as the Church of *Rome* does) *Tranſubſtantiation* to have been one principal part of the Chriſtian Doctrine, which the Apoſtles preached. But if this Doctrine be true, then all mens ſenſes are deceived in a plain ſenſible matter, wherein 'tis as hard for them to be deceived, as in any thing in the world: For two things can hardly be imagin'd more different, than a *little bit* of

of wafer, and the whole *body* of a man.

So that the Apoſtles perſwading men to believe this Doctrine, perſwaded them not to truſt their ſenſes, and yet the argument which they uſed to perſwade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that *mens ſenſes are to be truſted.* For if they be not, then notwithſtanding all the evidence the Apoſtles offer'd for the reſurrection of our Saviour, he might not be riſen; and ſo the faith of Chriſtians was vain. So that they repreſent the Apoſtles as abſurdly as is poſſible, *viz.* going about to perſwade men out of their ſenſes, by virtue of an argument, the whole ſtrength whereof depends upon the certainty of ſenſe.

And now the matter is brought to a fair iſſue. If the teſtimony of *ſenſe* be to be relied upon, then *Tranſubſtantiation* is falſe: If it be not, then no man is ſure that Chriſtianity is true. For the utmoſt aſſurance that the Apoſtles had of the truth of Chriſtianity, was the teſtimony of their own ſenſes concerning our Saviours miracles; and this teſtimony every man hath againſt *Tranſubſtantiation.* From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the Apoſtles themſelves) had more

more reaſon to believe *Chriſtianity* to be true, than every man hath to believe *Tranſubſtantiation* to be falſe. And we who did not ſee our Saviours Miracles (as the Apoſtles did) and have only a credible relation of them, but do ſee the *Sacrament*, have leſs evidence of the *truth of Chriſtianity* than of the *falſhood* of *Tranſubſtantiation*.

But cannot God impoſe upon the ſenſes of men, and repreſent things to them otherwiſe than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Moſt certainly. But then we ought to be aſſured that he hath made ſuch a Revelation; which *Aſſurance* no man can have, the certainty of ſenſe being taken away.

I ſhall preſs the buſineſs a little farther. Suppoſing the *Scripture* to be a *Divine Revelation*, and that theſe words [*This is my Body*] if they be in Scripture, muſt neceſſarily be taken in the ſtrict and literal ſenſe, I ask now, What greater evidence any man has, that theſe words [*This is my Body*] are in the Bible, than every man has that the Bread is not chang'd in the Sacrament? Nay no man has ſo much; for we have only the evidence of *one* ſenſe

ſenſe that theſe words are in the Bible, but that the Bread is not chang'd we have the concurring teſtimony of *ſeveral* of our ſenſes. In a word, if this be once admitted, that the *Senſes* of all men are deceiv'd in one of the moſt plain ſenſible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a *Divine Revelation* to men; nor is there any way to confute the groſſeſt impoſtures in the World: For if the clear evidence of all mans ſenſes be not ſufficient for this purpoſe, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will inſtance but in one Doctrine more; And that ſhall be, their *Doctrine* of *depoſing Kings* in caſe of Hereſie, and abſolving their Subjects from their Allegiance to them. And this is not a meer *ſpeculative Doctrine*, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Biſhops of *Rome*, as every one knows that is vers'd in Hiſtory. For the troubles and confuſions which were occaſion'd by this very thing, make up a good part of the Hiſtory of ſeveral Ages.

I hope no body expects that I ſhould take the pains to ſhew, that this was not the Doctrine of our Saviour and his Apoſtles,

poſtles, nor of the Primitive Chriſtians. The *Papiſts* are many of them ſo far from pretending this, that in ſome times and places, when it is not ſeaſonable and for their purpoſe, we have much a-do to perſwade them that ever it was their Doctrine. But if *Tranſubſtantiation* be their Doctrine, *this* is; for they came both out of the ſame Forge, I mean the Council of *Lateran* under Pope *Innocent* the Third. And if (as they tell us) *Tranſubſtantiation* was then eſtabliſh'd, ſo was *this*. And indeed one would think they were Twins, and brought forth at the ſame time, they are ſo like one another, that is, both of them ſo monſtrouſly unreaſonable.

II. I come now in the *ſecond* place, to conſider ſome *Practices* of the Church of *Rome*; which I am afraid will prove as bad as her *Doctrines*. I ſhall inſtance in theſe five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine ſervice *in an unknown tongue*. And that not only contrary to the practice of the primitive Church, and to the great end and deſign of Religious worſhip, which is the edification of thoſe who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do not

not underſtand) but likewiſe in direct contradiction to St. *Paul*, who hath no leſs than a whole Chapter, wherein he confutes this practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly, as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this practice was not condemned by St. *Paul*, or that it was allowed and uſed in the firſt Ages of Chriſtianity, need not be aſhamed to ſet up for the defence of any paradox in the World.

2. The Communion *in one kind*. And that notwithſtanding, that even by their own acknowledgment, our Saviour inſtituted it in both kinds, and the primitive Church adminiſtred it in both kinds. This I muſt acknowledg is *no addition* to Chriſtianity, but *a ſacrilegious taking away* of an eſſential part of the Sacrament. For the *Cup* is as eſſential a part of the inſtitution as the *Bread*; and they might as well, and by the ſame authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worſhipping of *Images*. Which practice (notwithſtanding all their diſtinctions about it, which are no other but what the *Heathens* uſed in the ſame caſe) is as point-blank againſt the *ſecond Com-*

Commandment, as a *deliberate* and *malicious killing* of a man is againſt the *ſixth*. But if the caſe be ſo plain, a man would think that at leaſt the Teachers and Guides of that Church ſhould be ſenſible of it. Why, they are ſo, and afraid the people ſhould be ſo too; And therefore in their ordinary *Catechiſms* and *Manuals* of Devotion, they leave out the *ſecond Commandment*, and divide the *tenth* into two to make up the number; leſt if the common people ſhould know it, their Conſciences ſhould ſtart at the doing of a thing ſo directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worſhipping of the *bread* and *wine* in the Euchariſt, out of a falſe and groundleſs perſwaſion, *that they are ſubſtantially changed into the body and blood of Chriſt*. Which if it be not true (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the moſt incredible things in the whole World) then by the confeſſion of ſeveral of their own learned Writers, they are guilty of *groſs idolatry*.

5. The worſhip and invocation of *Saints* and *Angels*; and particularly of the Virgin *Mary*, which hath now for ſome Ages been a principal part of their Religion. Now a man may juſtly wonder

that

that ſo conſiderable a part of Religion, as they make this to be, ſhould have no manner of foundation in the Scripture. Does our Saviour any-where ſpeak one word concerning the worſhipping of Her? Nay, does he not take all occaſions to reſtrain all extravagant apprehenſions and imaginations concerning the honour due to Her, as foreſeeing the degeneracy of the Church in this thing? When he was told that his Mother and Brethren were without: *Who* (ſays he) *are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the ſame is my mother, and ſiſter, and brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the bleſſed Mother of our Lord, *Bleſſed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee ſuck!* Our Saviour diverts to another thing, *Yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apoſtles in all their particular Precepts and directions concerning Prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to addreſs our ſelves to God, give the leaſt intimation of praying to the Virgin *Mary*, or making uſe of her Mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the *practice* of the Church from the

beginning, our *Saviour* and his Apoſtles would have been ſo ſilent about ſo conſiderable a part of Religion; Inſomuch that in all the Epiſtles of the Apoſtles I do not remember that her Name is ſo much as once mentioned? And yet the worſhip of her is at this day in the Church of *Rome*, and hath been ſo for ſeveral Ages, a main part of their publick worſhip, yea and of their private devotions too; in which it is uſual with them to ſay *ten Ave Maries* for *one Pater Noſter*, that is, for one Prayer they make to Almighty God, they make ten addreſſes to the bleſſed Virgin; for that is the proportion obſerved in their *Roſaries*. He that conſiders *this*, and had never ſeen the *Bible*, would have been apt to think, that there had been more ſaid concerning *Her* in Scripture, than either concerning *God*, or our bleſſed *Saviour*; and that the New Teſtament were full from one end to the other of precepts and exhortations to the worſhipping of Her; and yet when all is done, I challenge any man to ſhew me ſo much as one ſentence in the whole Bible that ſounds that way. And there is as little in the Chriſtian Writers of the firſt three hundred years. The truth is, *this practice* began to creep in among

ſome ſuperſtitious people about the middle of the *fourth century*; And I remember particularly, that *Epiphanius*, who lived about that time, calls it the *Hereſie of the Women*.

And thus I have given you ſome Inſtances of ſeveral *Doctrines* and *Practices*, which the Church of *Rome* have built upon the Foundation of *Chriſtianity*. Much more might have been ſaid of them; but from what hath been ſaid, any man may eaſily diſcern how dangerous they are to the ſalvation of men.

I proceed now in the Second place.

II. To conſider, whether our granting *a poſſibility of ſalvation*, though with great hazard, to thoſe in the Communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a ſufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our Church and go to theirs. And there is the more need to conſider this, becauſe this is the great *popular argument*, wherewith the *emiſſaries* and *agents* of that Church are wont to aſſault our people. *Your Church* (ſay they) *grants that a Papiſt may be ſaved; Ours denies that a Proteſtant can be ſaved: therefore it is ſafeſt to be of our Church, in which ſalvation, by the acknowledgment of both ſides, is poſſible.*

For

For anſwer to this, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that this is ſo far from being a *good argument*, that it is ſo intolerably *weak* and *ſophiſtical*, that any conſiderate man ought to be aſham'd to be catch'd by it. For either it is good of it ſelf, and ſufficient to perſwade a man to relinquiſh our Church, and to paſs over to theirs, without entring into the merits of the cauſe on either ſide, and without comparing the Doctrines and Practiſes of both the Churches together, or it is not. If it be not ſufficient *of it ſelf* to perſwade a man to leave our Church, without comparing the Doctrines on both ſides, then it is to no purpoſe, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of Doctrines, the one appear to be *true*, and the other *falſe*, this alone is ſufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that Church where the true Doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be ſaid, that this argument is good in it ſelf, without the examination of the Doctrines of both Churches; this ſeems a very ſtrange thing for any man to affirm, *That it is reaſon enough to a man to be of any Church, whatever*

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her Doctrines and Practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the Church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her Communion.

But they who use this *argument*, pretend that it is sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable *weakness* and *insufficiency* of it, to satisfie any mans conscience or prudence to change his Religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies.

2. Give some *parallel instances* by which it will clearly appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

I. I shall shew the *weakness* of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies; And that is this, *That whatever different parties in Religion agree in, is safest to be chosen.* The true consequence of which *principle*, if it be driven to the head, is, to perswade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of *natural Religion*, for in these all Religions do agree.

For if this *principle* be true, and ſignifie any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the ſeveral parties in Religion differ; becauſe that only is ſafe and prudent to be choſen wherein all agree. So that this *argument*, if the foundation of it be good, will perſwade further than thoſe who make uſe of it deſire it ſhould do; for it will not only make men forſake the *Proteſtant Religion*, but *Popery* too; and which is much more conſiderable, *Chriſtianity* it ſelf.

II. I will give ſome *parallel inſtances*, by which it will clearly be ſeen that this *argument* concludes falſe. The *Donatiſts* denied the Baptiſm of the Catholicks to be good, but the *Catholicks* acknowledged the Baptiſm of the *Donatiſts* to be valid. So that both ſides were agreed, that the Baptiſm of the *Donatiſts* was good; therefore the ſafeſt way for St. *Auſtin* and other *Catholicks* (according to this *argument*) was to be Baptized again by the *Donatiſts*, becauſe by the acknowledgment of both ſides, Baptiſm among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the Church of *Rome*. Several in that Church hold *the perſonal Infallibility of the Pope, and the lawfulneſs of depoſing and killing Kings for Hereſie*, to be *de fide*, that is, neceſſary Arti-

cles of Faith, and conſequently, that whoever does not believe them, cannot be ſaved. But a great many *Papiſts*, though they believe theſe things to be no matters of Faith, yet they think thoſe that hold them may be ſaved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this *argument*, they ought all to be of their opinion in theſe points, becauſe both ſides are agreed, that *they that hold them may be ſaved*; but one ſide poſitively ſays, that *men cannot be ſaved if they do not hold them.*

But my Text furniſheth me with as good an inſtance to this purpoſe as can be deſired. St. *Paul* here in the Text acknowledgeth the *poſſibility* of the *ſalvation* of thoſe *who built hay and ſtubble upon the foundation of Chriſtianity*; *that they might be ſaved*, though with great difficulty, and, as it were, *out of the fire.* But now among thoſe builders with hay and ſtubble, there were thoſe who denied the poſſibility of St. *Paul*'s ſalvation, and of thoſe who were of his mind. We are told of ſome who built the *Jewiſh* Ceremonies and obſervances upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, and ſaid, that unleſs men were Circumciſed and kept the Law of *Moſes*, they could not be ſaved. So that by this argument St. *Paul*

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and his followers ought to have gone over to those *Judaizing Christians*, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But these *Judaizing Christians* were as uncharitable to St. *Paul* and other Christians, as the Church of *Rome* is now to us; for they said positively, *that they could not be saved.* But can any man think, that St. *Paul* would have been moved by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation, for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument, you see, is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews, that it is a *contingent argument*, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it. I shall mention but these two:

1. According to this *principle*, it is always safest to be on the *uncharitable side*. And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true Church, as a man would wish. *Charity* is one of the most essential marks of Christianity; and what the Apostle saith of particular Christians, is as true of whole Churches, that *though they have all Faith,*

yet if they have not Charity, they are nothing.

I grant that no Charity teacheth men to ſee others damned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be conſider'd, that the damning of men is a very hard thing; and therefore whenever we do it, the caſe muſt be wonderfully plain. And is it ſo in this matter? They of the Church of *Rome* cannot deny, but that we embrace all the Doctrines of our Saviour, contain'd in the Apoſtles Creed, and determined by the Four firſt General Councils: And yet they will not allow this, and a good life, to put us within a poſſibility of ſalvation, becauſe we will not ſubmit to all the innovations they would impoſe upon us. And yet I think there is ſcarce any *Doctrine* or *Practice* in difference between them and us, which ſome or other of their moſt learned Writers have not acknowledged, either not to be ſufficiently contained in Scripture, or not to have been held and practiſed by the primitive Church; ſo that nothing can excuſe their uncharitableneſs towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this *argument*; for they do what in them lies, to make themſelves no

no Christians, that they may prove themselves the truer and more Christian Church; A *medium* which we do not desire to make use of.

2. If this *argument* were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error, which another does not account damnable, whatever it be; provided he do but damn all those that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but *confidence* and *uncharitableness* to do this. But is there any sense, that another mans boldness and want of charity should be an argument to move me to be of his opinion? I cannot illustrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful Physician and a Mountebank. A *learned* and *skilful Physician* is modest, and speaks *justly* of things: He says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe, and withall, that that which the *Mountebank* prescribes, may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it: But the *Mountebank*, who never talks of any thing less then *infallible cures*, (and always the more *Mountebank*, the stronger pretence to *infallibility*), he is *positive* that that method which the *Physician* prescribes will destroy the patient, but his receipt

receipt is infallible, and never fails. Is there any reaſon in this caſe, that this man ſhould carry it, meerly by his *confidence?* And yet if this *argument* be good, the ſafeſt way is to reject the *Phyſicians* advice, and to ſtick to the *Mountebanks*. For both ſides are agreed, that there is a poſſibility of cure in the *Mountebank's* method, but not in the *Phyſician's*; and ſo the whole force of the argument lies in the *confidence* of an *ignorant man*.

IV. This *argument* is very unfit to work upon *thoſe* to whom it is propounded: For either they believe we ſay true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reaſon to be moved by what we ſay. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we ſay in this matter? Namely, that though it be poſſible for ſome in the communion of the *Roman* Church to be ſaved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a ſafe condition already in our Church. And why then ſhould a *bare poſſibility*, accompany'd with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

Laſtly, This *argument* is very improper to be urged by thoſe who make uſe of it. Half of the ſtrength of it lies in this, that

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we *Proteſtants* acknowledg, that *it is poſſible a Papiſt may be ſaved.* But why ſhould they lay any ſtreſs upon this? What matter is it, what we Hereticks ſay, who are ſo damnably miſtaken in all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reaſon, yet becauſe we ſay it, it ſhould ſeem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive, when it ſerves for their purpoſe we have ſome little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in ſome meaſure ſatisfied of the *weakneſs of this argument*, which is ſo tranſparent, that no wiſe man can honeſtly uſe it, and he muſt have a very odd underſtanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a *caſual and contingent argument*, and ſometimes it concludes right, and oftner wrong; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one caſe, when all things are ſo equal on both ſides, that there is nothing elſe in the whole world to determine him; which ſurely can never happen in matters of Religion neceſſary to be believed. No man is ſo weak, as not to conſider in the change of his Religion, the *merits* of the *cauſe it ſelf*; as not to examine the *Doctrines* and *Practices* of the Churches on both ſides; as not to take notice

notice of the *confidence* and *Charity* of both Parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conſcientious and a prudent man: And if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either ſide, then this *argument* is needleſs, and comes too late, becauſe the work is already done without it.

Beſides, that the great hazard of ſalvation in the *Roman* Church (which we declare upon account of the *Doctrines* and *Practices* which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that Religion, than the acknowledged poſſibility of ſalvation in it, ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it: Never did any Chriſtian Church build ſo much *hay* and *ſtubble* upon the *foundation* of Chriſtianity; and therefore *thoſe that are ſaved in it, muſt be ſaved,* as it were, *out of the fire.* And though *Purgatory* be not meant in the Text, yet it is a Doctrine very well ſuted to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a *fire* to try their work what it is, and to *burn* up their *hay* and *ſtubble.* And I have ſo much Charity (and I deſire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who live piouſly, and have been almoſt inevitably detain'd in that

Church

Church by the prejudice of education and an invincible ignorance, will upon a *general repentance* find mercy with God; and *though their work ſuffer loſs and be burnt*, yet *they themſelves may eſcape, as out of the fire.* But as for thoſe who have had the opportunities of coming to the knowledg of the truth, if they continue in the errors of that Church, or apoſtatize from the truth, I think their condition ſo far from being ſafe, that there muſt be extraordinary favourable circumſtances in their caſe to give a man hopes of their ſalvation.

I have now done with the *two* things I propounded to ſpeak to. And I am ſorry that the *neceſſary defence* of our Religion, againſt the *reſtleſs importunities* and *attempts* of our adverſaries upon all ſorts of perſons, hath engaged me to ſpend ſo much time in matters of diſpute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witneſſes, that I have conſtantly made it my buſineſs, in this great Preſence and Aſſembly, to plead againſt the *impieties* and *wickedneſs* of men; and have endeavour'd, by the beſt arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a *firm belief* and ſerious *practice* of the main things of Religion. And, I do aſſure you, I had much rather perſwade

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any one to be a good man, than to be of any party or denomination of Christians whatsoever. For I doubt not, but *the belief of the ancient Creed*, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, *together with a good life, will certainly save a man*; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no not in an infallible Church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the *genius* and humour of the several Sects and Professions in Religion. And upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the Church of *England* to be the best constituted Church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the *Doctrine*, and *Government*, and *Worship* of it, are excellently framed to make men *soberly Religious:* Securing men on the one hand, from the wild freaks of *Enthusiasm*; and on the other, from the gross follies of *Superstition*. And our Church hath this peculiar advantage above several Professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the *civil Authority*, and hath always been untainted in its *loyalty*.

And now shall every trifling consideration

tion be ſufficient to move a man to relinquiſh ſuch a Church? There is no greater diſparagement to a mans underſtanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than raſhly to change ones Religion. *Religion* is our greateſt concernment of all other, and it is not every *little argument*, no nor a great noiſe about *infallibility*, nothing but very *plain* and *convincing evidence*, that ſhould ſway a man in this caſe. But they are utterly inexcuſable, who make a change of ſuch concernment, upon the inſinuations of one ſide only, without ever hearing what can be ſaid for the Church they were baptized and brought up in, before they leave it. They that can yield thus eaſily to the impreſſions of every one that hath a deſign and intereſt to make *Proſelytes*, may at this rate of diſcretion change their *Religion* twice a day, and inſtead of *morning* and *evening Prayer*, they may have a *morning* and an *evening Religion*.

Therefore, for Gods ſake, and for our own Souls ſake, and for the ſake of our Reputation, let us conſider and *ſhew our ſelves men*; Let us not ſuffer our ſelves to be ſhaken and carried away with every wind; Let us not run our ſelves into danger when we may be ſafe. Let us ſtick to the

the *foundation* of *Religion*, the *Articles* of our *common belief*, and build upon them gold, and ſilver, and precious ſtones, I mean, the *virtues and actions of a good life*; and if we would do this, we ſhould not be apt to ſet ſuch a value upon *hay* and *ſtubble*. If we would ſincerely endeavour to live *holy and virtuous lives*, we ſhould not need to caſt about for a *Religion*, which may furniſh us with eaſie and indirect ways to get to Heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apoſtles Exhortation; *Wherefore, my beloved Brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great Shepherd of the ſheep, by the blood of the everlaſting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt, to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

A SER-

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SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

WHITE-HALL,

IN

LENT,

March 20th 1673.

Pſal. CXIX. 156.

Great peace have they that love thy Law, and nothing ſhall offend them.

IN theſe words there are two things contained, The Deſcription of a good man, and the Reward of his goodneſs. 1. The Deſcription of a good man. He is ſaid to be one that *loves the Law* of God, that is, that loves to meditate upon it, and to practiſe it. 2. The Reward of his goodneſs; *Great peace have they that love thy Law.* The word *Peace* is many times uſed in Scripture in a very large ſenſe, ſo as to comprehend all kind of happineſs: ſometimes it ſignifies outward peace and quiet in oppoſition to war and contention; and ſometimes inward peace and contentment in oppoſition to inward trouble and anguiſh. I underſtand the *Text* chiefly in

this laſt ſenſe, not wholly excluding either of the other.

My deſign at preſent from theſe words is, to recommend Religion to men from the conſideration of that inward peace and pleaſure which attends it. And ſurely nothing can be ſaid more to the advantage of Religion in the opinion of conſiderate men than this. For the aim of all Philoſophy, and the great ſearch of wiſe men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind. And if Religion be able to give this, a greater commendation need not be given to Religion.

But before I enter upon this Argument, I ſhall premiſe *two* things by way of Caution.

Firſt, That theſe kind of Obſervations are not to be taken too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, as if they never failed in any one inſtance. *Ariſtotle* obſerved long ſince, that moral and proverbial ſayings are underſtood to be true generally and for the moſt part; and that is all the truth that is to be expected in them: As, when *Solomon* ſays, *Train up a child in the way wherein he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*: This is not to be ſo taken, as if no child that is piouſly educated did ever miſcarry afterwards, but that the good education of children is the beſt way to make good men, and commonly approved

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to be ſo by experience. So here, when it is ſaid that *great peace have they that love Gods Law*; the meaning is, that Religion hath generally this effect, though in ſome caſes, and as to ſome perſons, it may be accidentally hindered.

Secondly, When I ſay that Religion gives peace and tranquillity to our minds, this is chiefly to be underſtood of a Religious ſtate, in which a man is well ſettled and confirmed, and not of our firſt entrance into it, for that is more or leſs troubleſome according as we make it. If we begin a religious courſe betimes, before we have contracted any great guilt, and before the habits of ſin be grown ſtrong in us, the work goes on eaſily, without any great conflict or reſiſtance. But the caſe is otherwiſe when a man breaks off from a wicked life, and becomes religious from the direct contrary courſe, in which he hath been long and deeply engaged. In this caſe no man is ſo unreaſonable as to deny, that there is a great deal of ſenſible trouble and difficulty in the making of this change; but when it is once made, peace and comfort will ſpring up by degrees, and daily encreaſe, as we grow more confirmed and eſtabliſhed in a good courſe.

Theſe *two* things being premiſed, I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew, that Religion

gives a man the greateſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction of mind, and that there is no true peace, nor any comparable pleaſure to be had in a contrary courſe. And that from theſe two heads. From *Teſtimony of Scripture*; and from the *Nature of Religion*, which is apt to produce peace and tranquility of mind.

I. *Firſt*, From *Teſtimony of Scripture*. I ſhall ſelect ſome of thoſe *Texts* which are more full and expreſs to this purpoſe, *Job* 22. 21, ſpeaking of God, *Acquaint thy ſelf now with him, and be at peace. To acquaint our ſelves with God*, is a phraſe of the ſame importance with *coming to God*, and *ſeeking of him*, and many other like expreſſions in Scripture, which ſignifie nothing elſe but to become religious, *Pſal.* 37. 38, *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace:* Or, as theſe words are rendred, according to the LXX. in our old Tranſlation, *Keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right, for that ſhall bring thee peace at the laſt.* Prov. 3. 17, Where *Solomon* ſpeaking of *Wiſdom*, which with him is but another name for *Religion*, ſays, *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Iſa. 32. 17; *The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.* Matt. 11.28,29, *Come unto me all*

ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Now *to come to Christ*, is to become his Disciples, to believe and practise his Doctrine; for so our *Saviour* explains himself in the next words; *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest for your souls.* Rom. 2. 10, *Glory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good.*

And on the contray; the *Scripture* represents the condition of a sinner to be full of trouble and disquiet. *David*, though he was a very good man, yet when he had grievously offended God, the anguish of his mind was such, as even to disorder and distemper his body, *Psal.* 38.2,3,4, *Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head, and as an heavy burthen they are too heavy for me.* Isa. 57. 20, 21, *The wicked are like the troubled Sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* And *Isa.* 59. 7. 8, *Misery and destruction are in their paths, and the way of peace they know not; they have made themselves crooked paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.* Rom. 2. 9, *Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.*

You see how full and expres's the *Scripture* is in this matter. I come now in the

II. *Second* place, To give you a more particular account of this, from the *Nature of Religion*, which is apt to produce peace and tranquillity of mind. And that I shall do in these three particulars.

1. Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.

2. It furnisheth us with all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

3. The reflection upon a religious course of life, and all the actions of it, doth afterwards yield great pleasure and satisfaction.

First, *Religion is apt to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet.* The chief causes of inward trouble and discontent are these *two*, *Doubting* and anxiety of mind, and *Guilt* of Conscience. Now Religion is apt to free us from both these.

1. From *Doubting* and anxiety of mind. Irreligion and Atheism makes a man full of doubts and jealousies whether he be in the right, and whether at last things will not prove quite otherwise than he hath rashly determined. For though a man endeavour never so much to settle himself in the principles of Infidelity, and to perswade his mind that there is no God, and consequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor punishments to be feared

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in another life; yet he can never attain to a ſteddy and unſhaken perſwaſion of theſe things: And however he may pleaſe himſelf with witty reaſonings againſt the common belief of mankind, and ſmart reparties to their arguments, and bold and pleaſant raillery about theſe matters; yet I dare ſay, no man ever ſate down in a clear and full ſatisfaction concerning them. For, when he hath done all that he can to reaſon himſelf out of Religion, his conſcience ever and anon recoyls upon him, and his natural thoughts and apprehenſions riſe up againſt his reaſonings, and all his wit and ſubtilty is confuted and born down by a ſecret and ſtrong ſuſpicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwiſe.

And the reaſon hereof is plain, becauſe all this is an endeavour againſt nature, and thoſe vigorous inſtincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary. For whenever our minds are free, and not violently hurried away by paſſion, nor blinded by prejudice, they do of themſelves return to their firſt and moſt natural apprehenſions of things. And this is the reaſon why, when the Atheiſt falls into any great calamity, and is awakened to an impartial conſideration of things, by the apprehenſion of death and judgment, and

deſpairs

deſpairs of enjoying any longer thoſe pleaſures, for the ſake of which he hath all this while rebelled againſt Religion, his courage preſently ſinks, and all his arguments fail him, and his caſe is now too ſerious to admit of jeſting, and at the bottom of his ſoul he doubts of all that which he aſſerted with ſo much confidence, and ſet ſo good a face upon before; and can find no eaſe to his mind, but in retreating from his former principles, nor no hopes of conſolation for himſelf, but in acknowledging that God whom he hath denied, and imploring his mercy whom he hath affronted.

This is always the caſe of theſe perſons when they come to extremity; not to mention the infinite checks and rebukes, which their own minds give them upon other occaſions; ſo that 'tis very ſeldom that theſe men have any tolerable enjoyment of themſelves, but are forced to run away from themſelves into company, and to ſtupify themſelves by intemperance, that they may not feel the fearful twitches and gripings of their own minds.

Whereas he who entertains the principles of Religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehenſions, and the general voice of mankind, and is not conſcious to himſelf, that he knowingly and wilful-

ly lives contrary to these principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about these things; being verily perſwaded they are true, and that he hath all the reaſon in the world to think ſo; And if they ſhould prove otherwiſe (which he hath no cauſe to ſuſpect) yet he hath this ſatisfaction, that he hath taken the wiſeſt courſe, and hath conſulted his own preſent peace and future ſecurity, infinitely better than the Atheiſt hath done, in caſe he ſhould prove to be miſtaken. For it is a fatal miſtake to think there is no God, if there be one; but a miſtake on the other hand hath no future bad conſequences depending upon it; nor indeed any great preſent inconvenience, Religion only reſtraining a man from doing ſome things, from moſt of which it is good he ſhould be reſtrained however: ſo that at the worſt, the religious man is only miſtaken, but the Atheiſt is miſerable if he be miſtaken: *miſerable* beyond all imagination, and paſt all remedy.

2. Another, and indeed a principal cauſe of trouble and diſcontent to the minds of men is *Guilt*. Now Guilt is a conſciouſneſs to our ſelves that we have done amiſs; and the very thought that we have done amiſs is apt to lie very croſs in our minds, and to cauſe great anguiſh and confuſion. Beſides that Guilt is always attended with

Fear,

Fear, which naturally ſprings up in the mind of man from a ſecret apprehenſion of the miſchief and inconvenience that his ſin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance that hangs over him from God, and will overtake him either in this world, or the other.

And though the ſinner, while he is in full health and proſperity, may make a ſhift to divert and ſhake off theſe fears; yet they frequently return upon him, and upon every little noiſe of danger, upon the apprehenſion of any calamity that comes near him, his guilty mind is preſently jealous that it is making towards him, and is particularly levelled againſt him. For he is ſenſible that there is a juſt power above him, to whoſe indignation he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear of him; and how long ſoever he may have ſcaped puniſhment in this world, he cannot but dread the vengeance of the other; And theſe thoughts are a continual diſturbance to his mind, and *in the midſt of laughter make his heart heavy*; And the longer he continues in a wicked courſe, the more he multiplies the grounds and cauſes of his fears.

But now Religion frees a man from all this torment, either by preventing the cauſe of it, or directing to the cure; either by

by preſerving us from guilt, or clearing us of it in caſe we have contracted it. It preſerves us from guilt by keeping us innocent; and in caſe we have offended, it clears us of it, by leading us to repentance and the amendment of our lives; which is the onely way to recover the favour of God, and the peace of our own conſciences, and to ſecure us againſt all apprehenſion of danger from the divine Juſtice; though not abſolutely from all fear of puniſhment in this world, yet from that which is the great danger of all, the condemnation and torment of the world to come. And by this means a man's mind is ſetled in perfect peace, Religion freeing him from thoſe tormenting fears of the Divine diſpleaſure, which he can upon no other terms rid himſelf of; whereas the ſinner is always ſowing the ſeeds of trouble in his own mind, and laying a foundation of continual diſcontent to himſelf.

Secondly, As Religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and diſquiet, ſo it *miniſters to us all the true cauſes of peace and tranquillity of mind.* Whoever lives according to the rules of Religion, lays theſe three great foundations of peace and comfort to himſelf.

1. He is ſatisfied that in being religious he doth that which is moſt reaſonable.

2. That

2. That he ſecures himſelf againſt the greateſt miſchiefs and dangers, by making God his Friend.

3. That upon the whole matter he do's in all reſpects moſt effectually conſult and promote his own intereſt and happineſs.

1. He is ſatisfied that he does that which is moſt reaſonable. And it is no ſmall pleaſure to be juſtified to our ſelves, to be ſatisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reaſon we ought to do; that which beſt becomes us, and which according to the primitive intention of our Being is moſt natural, for whatever is natural is pleaſant. Now the practice of piety towards God, and of every other grace and virtue which Religion teacheth us, are things reaſonable in themſelves, and what God when he made us, intended we ſhould do. And a man is then pleaſed with himſelf, and his own actions, when he doth what he is convinced he ought to do; and is then offended with himſelf, when he goes againſt the light of his own mind, by neglecting his duty, or doing contrary to it; for then his conſcience checks him, and there is ſomething within him that is uneaſie, and puts him into diſorder; As when a man eats or drinks any thing that is unwholſom, it offends his ſtomach. and puts his body into an unnatural and a reſtleſs ſtate.

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For every thing is then at reſt and peace, when it is in that ſtate in which Nature intended it to be; and being violently forced out of it, it is never quiet till it recover it again. Now Religion and the practice of its virtues, is the natural ſtate of the ſoul, the condition to which God deſigned it. As God made man a Reaſonable creature, ſo all the acts of Religion are reaſonable and ſuitable to our nature: And our ſouls are then in health, when we are what the Laws of Religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. And as we find an unexpreſſible eaſe and pleaſure when our body is in its perfect ſtate of health, and on the contrary every diſtemper cauſeth pain and uneaſineſs; ſo is it with the ſoul. When Religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds, and the courſe of our lives is conformable to the precepts of it, all is at peace. But when we are otherwiſe, and live in any vitious practice, how can there be peace, ſo long as we act unreaſonably, and do thoſe things whereby we neceſſarily create trouble and diſturbance to our ſelves? How can we hope to be at eaſe, ſo long as we are in a ſick and diſeaſed condition? Till the corruption that is in us be wrought out, our ſpirits will be in a perpetual tumult and fermentation;

mentation; and it is as impoſſible for us to enjoy the peace and ſerenity of our minds, as it is for a ſick man to be at eaſe: He may uſe what arts of diverſion he will, and change from one place and poſture to another: but ſtill he is reſtleſs, becauſe there is that within him which gives him pain and diſturbance. *There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.* Such men may diſſemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleaſantneſs and contentment; but God, who ſees all the ſecrets of mens hearts, knows it is far otherwiſe with them. *There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.*

2. Another ground of peace which the religious man hath, is, That he hath made God his Friend. Now Friendſhip is peace and pleaſure both; It is mutual love, and that is a double pleaſure; And it is hard to ſay which is the greateſt, the pleaſure of loving God, or of knowing that he loves us. Now whoever ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe God, may reſt perfectly aſſured that God hath no diſpleaſure againſt him; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and his countenance ſhall behold the upright*, that is, he will be favourable to ſuch perſons. As *he hates the workers of iniquity*, ſo *he takes pleaſure in them that fear him, in ſuch as keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them.* And

And being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears; and may say with *David, Return then unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee: The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear; The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* What can reasonably trouble or discontent that man who hath made his peace with God, and is restored to his favour, who is the best and most powerful friend, and can be the sorest and most dangerous enemy in the whole World?

3. By being religious we do most effectually consult our own interest and happiness. A great part of Religion consists in moderating our appetites and passions, and this naturally tends to the composure of our minds. He that lives piously and virtuously acts according to Reason, and in so doing maintains the present peace of his own mind; and not only so, but he lays the foundation of his future happiness to all Eternity. For Religion gives a man the hopes of eternal life: And all pleasure does not consist in present enjoyment; there is a mighty pleasure also, in the firm belief and expectation of a future good; and if it be a great and a lasting good, it will support a man under a

great many preſent evils. If Religion be certainly the way to avoid the greateſt evils, and to bring us to happineſs at laſt, we may contentedly bear a great many afflictions for its ſake. For though all ſuffering be grievous, yet it is pleaſant to eſcape great dangers, and to come to the poſſeſſion of a mighty good, though it be with great difficulty and inconvenience to our ſelves. And when we come to heaven (if ever we be ſo happy as to get thither) it will be a new and a greater pleaſure to us, to remember the pains and troubles whereby we were ſaved and made happy.

So that all theſe, put together, are a firm foundation of peace and comfort to a good man. There is a great ſatisfaction in the very doing of our duty, and acting reaſonably, though there may happen to be ſome preſent trouble and inconvenience in it. But when we do not only ſatisfie our ſelves in ſo doing, but likewiſe pleaſe him whoſe favour is better than life, and whoſe frowns are more terrible than death; when in doing our duty we directly promote our own happineſs, and in ſerving God do moſt effectually ſerve our own intereſt, what can be imagined to miniſter more peace and pleaſure to the mind of man?

This is the *ſecond thing*. Religion furniſheth us with all the true cauſes of

of peace and tranquillity of mind.

Thirdly, The Reflection upon a religious and virtuous course of life doth afterwards yield a mighty pleasure and satisfaction. And what can commend Religion more to us, than that the remembrance of any pious and virtuous action gives us so much contentment and delight? So that whatever difficulty and reluctancy we may find in the doing of it, to be sure, there is peace and satisfaction in the looking back upon it. No man ever reflected upon himself with regret for having done his duty to God or man; for having lived soberly, or righteously, or godly in this present world. Nay, on the contrary, the conscience of any duty faithfully discharged, the memory of any good we have done, does refresh the soul with a strange kind of pleasure and joy. *Our rejoycing is this* (saith St. *Paul*) *the testimony of our consciences, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.*

But, on the other side, the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to our selves, do certainly leave a sting behind them. And whatever pleasure there may be in the present act of them, the memory of them is so tormenting, that men are glad to use all

the arts of diverſion to fence off the thoughts of them. One of the greateſt troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himſelf, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the conſciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not here now a mighty difference between theſe two courſes of life; that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is ſoon over, but the pleaſure of it is perpetual: when we do a wicked action, the pleaſure of it is ſhort and tranſient, but the trouble and ſting of it remains for ever? The reflection upon the good we have done, gives a laſting ſatisfaction to our minds; but the remembrance of any evil committed by us leaves a perpetual diſcontent.

And, which is yet more conſiderable, a religious and virtuous courſe of life does then yield moſt peace and comfort, when we moſt ſtand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like to that of a good conſcience: This makes all calm and ſerene within, when there is nothing but clouds and darkneſs about him. So *David* obſerves of the good man, *Pſal.* 112.4, *Unto the upright there ariſeth light in darkneſs.* All the pious and virtuous actions that we do,

do, are ſo many ſeeds of peace and comfort, ſown in our conſciences, which will ſpring up and flouriſh moſt in times of outward trouble and diſtreſs. *Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart.* And, at the hour of death, *The righteous hath hopes in his death*, ſaith *Solomon.* And what a ſeaſonable refreſhment is it to the mind of man, when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is juſt ſtepping into the other world, to be able to look back with ſatisfaction upon a religious and well-ſpent life? Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man do overflow, and a kind of heaven ſprings up in his mind, and he rejoyceth in the hopes of the glory of God. And that is a true and ſolid comfort indeed, which will ſtand by us in the day of adverſity, and ſtick cloſe to us when we have moſt need of it.

But with the ungodly it is not ſo: His guilt lies in wait for him eſpecially againſt ſuch times, and is never more fierce and raging than in the day of diſtreſs; ſo that according as his troubles without are multiplyed, ſo are his ſtings within. And ſurely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneaſie mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable; the *ſpirit of*

a man might bear his infirmities, but a wounded ſpirit who can bear? But eſpecially at the hour of death. How does the guilt of his wicked life then ſtare him in the face? What ſtorms and tempeſts are raiſed in his ſoul? which make it like the troubled ſea when it cannot reſt. When Eternity, that fearful and amazing ſight, preſents it ſelf to his mind, and he feels himſelf ſinking into the regions of darkneſs, and is every moment in a fearful expectation of meeting with the juſt reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the ſins of his life? and how full of rage and indignation is he againſt himſelf for having neglected to know, when he had ſo many opportunities of knowing them, the things that belonged to his peace; and which, becauſe he hath neglected them, are now, and likely to be for ever, hid from his eyes?

And if this be the true caſe of the righteous and wicked man, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any mans thoughts, in which of theſe conditions he would be. And ſurely the difference between them is ſo very plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

But now, though this diſcourſe be very true, yet for the full clearing of this matter, it will be but fair to conſider what

may

may be ſaid on the other ſide; And the rather, becauſe there are ſeveral objections which ſeem to be countenanced from experience, which is enough to overthrow the moſt plauſible ſpeculation. As,

1. That wicked men ſeem to have a great deal of pleaſure and contentment in their vices.

2. That Religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of.

3. That thoſe who are religious, are many times very diſconſolate and full of trouble.

To the *firſt*. I deny not that wicked men have ſome pleaſure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and juſt abatements made, it will amount to very little. For it is the loweſt and meaneſt kind of pleaſure, it is chiefly the pleaſure of our bodies and our ſenſes, of our worſt part; the pleaſure of the beaſt, and not of the man; that which leaſt becomes us, and which we were leaſt of all made for. Thoſe ſenſual pleaſures which are lawful, are much inferiour to the leaſt ſatisfaction of the mind; and when they are unlawful, they are always inconſiſtent with it. And *what is a man profited*, if to gain a little ſenſual pleaſure, he loſe

the peace of his ſoul? Can we find in our hearts to call that pleaſure, which robs us of a far greater and higher ſatisfaction than it brings? The delights of ſenſe are ſo far from being the chief pleaſure for which God deſigned us, that, on the contrary, he intended we ſhould take our chief pleaſure in the reſtraining and moderating of our ſenſual appetites and deſires, and in keeping them within the bounds of Reaſon and Religion.

And then, It is not a laſting pleaſure. Thoſe fits of mirth which wicked men have, how ſoon are they over? Like a ſudden blaze, which after a little flaſh and noiſe is preſently gone. It is the compariſon of a very great and experienced man in theſe matters, *Like the crackling of thorns under a pot* (ſaith *Solomon*), *ſo is the laughter of the fool*, that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it laſts not.

But, which is moſt conſiderable of all, the pleaſures of ſin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miſeries and inconveniences which they draw after them. Many times, poverty and reproach, pains and diſeaſes upon our bodies, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul of man that doth evil.* So that if theſe pleaſures were greater than they

they are, a man had better be without them, than purchaſe them at ſuch dear rates.

To the *ſecond.* That Religion impoſeth many harſh and grievous things, which ſeem to be inconſiſtent with that pleaſure and ſatisfaction I have ſpoken of: As, the bearing of perſecution, repentance and mortification, faſting and abſtinence, and many other rigours and ſeverities. As to perſecution; This Diſcourſe doth not pretend that Religion exempts men from outward troubles, but that, when they happen, it ſupports men under them, better than any thing elſe. As for Repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our firſt entrance into Religion, after a wicked life, which I acknowledged, in the beginning of this diſcourſe, to be very grievous: But this doth not hinder, but that though Religion may be troubleſome at firſt to ſome perſons, whoſe former ſins and crimes have made it ſo, it may be pleaſant afterwards when we are accuſtomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unleſs we reſolve to be miſerable; for *except we repent we muſt periſh.* Now there is always a rational ſatisfaction in ſubmitting to a leſs inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for Faſting

ing and abſtinence; which is many times very helpful and ſubſervient to the ends of Religion, there is no ſuch extraordinary trouble in it, if it be diſcreetly managed, as is worth the ſpeaking of. And as for other rigours and ſeverities, which ſome pretend Religion does impoſe, I have only this to ſay, that if men will play the fool, and make Religion more troubleſome than God hath made it, I cannot help that: And, that this is a falſe repreſentation of Religion, which ſome in the world have made, as if it did chiefly conſiſt not in pleaſing God, but in diſpleaſing and tormenting our ſelves. This is not to paint Religion like her ſelf, but rather like one of the *Furies*, with nothing but whips and ſnakes about her.

To the *third*. That thoſe who are religious are many times very diſconſolate and full of trouble. This, I confeſs, is a great Objection indeed, if Religion were the cauſe of this trouble; but there are other plain cauſes of it, to which Religion, rightly underſtood, is not acceſſary. As, falſe and miſtaken principles in Religion. The imperfection of our Religion and obedience to God. And a melancholly temper and diſpoſition. *Falſe and miſtaken principles in Religion.* As this for one; That God does not ſincerely

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deſire the ſalvation of men, but hath from all eternity effectually barr'd the greateſt part of mankind from all poſſibility of attaining that happineſs which he offers to them; and every one hath cauſe to fear that he may be in that number. This were a melancholly conſideration indeed, if it were true; but there is no ground either from Reaſon or Scripture to entertain any ſuch thought of God. Our *deſtruction is of our ſelves*; and no man ſhall be ruined by any decree of God, who does not ruin himſelf by his own fault.

Or elſe, *the imperfection of our Religion and obedience to God.* Some, perhaps, are very devout in ſerving God, but not ſo kind and charitable, ſo juſt and honeſt in their dealings with men. No wonder if ſuch perſons be diſquieted; the natural conſciences of men being not more apt to diſquiet them for any thing, than for the neglect of thoſe moral duties, which natural light teacheth them. Peace of conſcience is the effect of an impartial and univerſal obedience to the laws of God; and I hope no man will blame Religion for that which plainly proceeds from the want of Religion.

Or laſtly. *A melancholly temper and diſpoſition*; which is not from Religion, but from our nature and conſtituion, and

therefore

therefore Religion ought not to be charged with it.

And thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and plainly as I could, to repreſent to you what peace and pleaſure, what comfort and ſatisfaction, Religion, rightly underſtood and ſincerely practiſed, is apt to bring to the minds of men. And I do not know by what ſort of Argument Religion can be more effectually recommended to wiſe and conſiderate men. For in perſwading men to be religious, I do not go about to rob them of any true pleaſure and contentment, but to direct them to the very beſt, nay indeed the onely way of attaining and ſecuring it.

I ſpeak this in great pity and compaſſion to thoſe who make it their great deſign to pleaſe themſelves, but do grievouſly miſtake the way to it. The direct way is that which I have ſet before you, a holy and virtuous life, *to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly and righteouſly and godly in this preſent world. A good man* (ſaith *Solomon*) *is ſatisfied from himſelf:* He hath the pleaſure of being wiſe, and acting reaſonably; the pleaſure of being juſtified to himſelf in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the ſentence of his own mind. There is a great pleaſure in being innocent, becauſe

that

that prevents guilt and trouble; It is pleaſant to be virtuous and good, becauſe that is to excel many others; and it is pleaſant to grow better, becauſe that is to excel our ſelves: Nay, it is pleaſant even to mortifie and ſubdue our luſts, becauſe that is Victory: It is pleaſant to command our appetites and paſſions, and to keep them in due order, within the bounds of Reaſon and Religion, becauſe this is a kind of Empire, this is to govern. It is naturally pleaſant to rule and have power over others, but he is the great and the abſolute Prince who commands himſelf. This is *the Kingdom of God within us*, a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all *the Kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them.* It is *the Kingdom of God*, deſcribed by the *Apoſtle*, which conſiſts *in righteouſneſs and peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* In a word; The pleaſure of being good and of doing good, is the chief happineſs of God himſelf.

But now the wicked man deprives himſelf of all this pleaſure, and creates perpetual diſcontent to his own mind. O the torments of a guilty conſcience! which the ſinner feels more or leſs all his life long. But, alas, thou doſt not yet know the worſt of it, no not in this World.

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What wilt thou do when thou comeſt to die? What comfort wilt thou then be able to give thy ſelf? or what comfort can any one elſe give thee? when thy conſcience is miſerably rent and torn, by thoſe waking furies, which will then rage in thy breaſt, and thou knoweſt not which way to turn thy ſelf for eaſe; then, perhaps at laſt, the Prieſt is unwillingly ſent for, to patch up thy conſcience as well as he can, and to appeaſe the cryes of it; and to force himſelf out of very pity and good nature, *to ſay, peace, peace, when there is no peace.* But alas man! what can we do? what comfort can we give thee, when thine iniquities teſtifie againſt thee to thy very face? *How can there be peace,* when thy luſts and debaucheries, thy impieties to God and thy injuries to men, have been ſo many? *How can there be peace,* when thy whole life hath been a continued contempt and provocation of Almighty God, and a perpetual violence and affront to the light and reaſon of thy own mind?

Therefore whatever temptation there may be in ſin at a diſtance, whatever pleaſure in the act and commiſſion of it, yet remember that it always goes off with trouble, and *will be bitterneſs in the end.* Thoſe words of *Solomon* have a terrible

ſting in the concluſion of them, *Rejoyce O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment.* This one thought which will very often unavoidably break into our minds (that *God will bring us into judgment*) is enough to daſh all our contentment, and to ſpoil all the pleaſure of a ſinful life. Never expect to be quiet in thine own mind, and to have the true enjoyment of thy ſelf, till thou liveſt a virtuous and religious life.

And if this diſcourſe be true (as I am confident I have every mans conſcience on my ſide) I ſay, if this be true, let us venture to be wiſe and happy, that is, to be Religious. Let us reſolve to *break off our ſins by repentance*, to *fear God and keep his Commandments*, as ever we deſire to avoid the unſpeakable torments of a guilty mind, and would not be perpetually uneaſie to our ſelves.

Grant we beſeech thee, Almighty God, that we may every one of us know and do in this our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.

And

And the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great Shepherd of the ſheep, by the blood of the everlaſting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us always that which is well-pleaſing in his ſight, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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Preached before the

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Febr. 26th 167$\frac{4}{5}$.

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SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

Febr. 26th 167⅘.

PSAL. CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

THE two great cauſes of the ruin of men, are *Infidelity* and *want of conſideration.* Some do not believe the principles of Religion, or at leaſt have by arguing againſt them rendered them ſo doubtful to themſelves, as to take away the force and efficacy of them: But theſe are but a ve-

very ſmall part of mankind, in compariſon of thoſe who periſh for want of conſidering theſe things. For moſt men take the principles of Religion for granted, *That there is a God*, and a *Providence*, and a *State of Rewards and Puniſhments after this life*, and never entertained any conſiderable doubt in their minds to the contrary: But for all this, they never attended to the proper and natural conſequences of theſe principles, nor applyed them to their own caſe; They never ſeriouſly conſidered the notorious inconſiſtency of their lives with this belief, and what manner of perſons they ought to be who are verily perſwaded of the truth of theſe things.

For no man that is convinced that there is a God, and conſiders the neceſſary and immediate conſequences of ſuch a perſwaſion, can think it ſafe to affront Him by a wicked life: No man that believes the infinite happineſs and miſery of another world, and conſiders withall that one of theſe ſhall certainly be his portion, according as he demeans himſelf in this preſent life, can think it indifferent what courſe he takes. Men may thruſt away theſe thoughts, and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man that enters into the ſerious conſideration.

ſideration of theſe matters, can poſſibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miſerable for ever.

So that a great part of the evils of mens lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart; would they but ſeriouſly conſider the conſequences of a wicked life, they would ſee ſo plain reaſon, and ſo urgent a neceſſity for the reforming of it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This courſe *David* took here in the Text, and he found the happy ſucceſs of it; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.*

In which Words there are theſe two things conſiderable.

I. The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways.*

II. The ſucceſs of this courſe. It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

Theſe are the two heads of my following diſcourſe; which when I have ſpoken to, I ſhall endeavour to per-

ſwade my ſelf and you to take the ſame courſe which *David* here did, and God grant that it may have the ſame effect.

I. We will conſider *the courſe which* David *here took* for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways*, or, as the words are rendered in our old Tranſlation, *I called mine own ways to remembrance.* And this may either ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of his life, reſpecting indifferently the good or bad actions of it: Or elſe, which is more probable, it may ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of his life; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance. Neither of theſe ſenſes can be much amiſs in order to the effect mentioned in the Text, *viz.* the reformation and amendment of our lives; and therefore neither of them can reaſonably be excluded, though I ſhall principally inſiſt upon the later.

1. This *thinking of our ways* may ſignifie a general ſurvey and examination of our lives, reſpecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For *Way* is a Metaphorical word, denoting the courſe of a mans life and actions. *I thought on my ways*, that is, I examined my life, and called my

my ſelf to a ſtrict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the Law of God, the rule and meaſure of my duty, and conſidered how far I had obeyed that Law, or offended againſt it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in compariſon of what I might and ought to have done: That by this means I might come to underſtand the true ſtate and condition of my ſoul, and diſcerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiſs, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it muſt needs be a thing of excellent uſe, for men to ſet apart ſome particular times for the examination of themſelves, that they may know how accounts ſtand between God and them. *Pythagoras* (or whoever were the Author of thoſe *golden verſes* which paſs under his name) doth eſpecially recommend this practice to his Scholars, every night before they ſlept, to call themſelves to account for the actions of the day paſt; enquiring wherein they had tranſgreſſed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this no doubt is an admirable means to improve men in vertue, a moſt effectual way to keep our conſciences continually waking and tender, and to make us ſtand in

awe of our ſelves, and afraid to ſin, when we know before-hand that we muſt give ſo ſevere an account to our ſelves of every action.

And certainly it is a great piece of wiſdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in ſome meaſure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppreſſed and confounded by the inſupportable weight of the ſins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worſt time, when we are ſick and weak, and have neither underſtanding nor leiſure to recollect our ſelves, and to call our ſins diſtinctly to remembrance, much leſs to exerciſe any fit and proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in Religion when our Reaſon is once departed from us; then darkneſs hath overtaken us indeed, and *the night is come when no man can work.* But though we were never ſo ſenſible, and ſhould do all we can at that time, yet after all this, how it will go with us God alone knows. I am ſure it is too much preſumption for any man to be confident that one general and confuſed act of repentance will ſerve his turn for the ſins of his whole life. Therefore there is great reaſon why we ſhould often ex-

examine our ſelves, both in order to the amendment of our lives, and the eaſe of our conſciences when we come to dye.

2. This *thinking of our ways* may particularly and ſpecially refer to the ſins and miſcarriages of our lives: *I thought on my ways*, that is, I called my ſins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them ſeriouſly to heart; I conſidered all the circumſtances and conſequences of them, and all other things belonging to them; and reaſoning the matter throughly with my ſelf, came to a peremptory and fixed reſolution of breaking off this wicked courſe of life, and betaking my ſelf to the obedience of God's Laws. And the *conſideration of our ways* taken in this ſenſe (which ſeems to be the more probable meaning of the Words) may reaſonably imply in it theſe following particulars.

1. The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.

2. A hearty trouble and ſorrow for them; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid them ſadly to heart.

3. A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe.

4. A

4. A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life.

5. A full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this courſe.

6. An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of doing this.

1. *The taking of a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them.* And to this end, we may do well to reflect particularly upon the ſeveral ſtages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at leaſt the principal miſcarriages belonging to each of them. And the better to enable us hereto, it will be uſeful to have before our eyes ſome abridgement or ſummary of the Laws of God, containing the chief heads of duties and ſins, of vertues and vices; For this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwiſe perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We ſhould likewiſe conſider the ſeveral relations wherein we have ſtood to others, and how far we have tranſgreſſed or failed of our duty in any of thoſe reſpects.

And having thus far made up our ſad account, we may in a great meaſure underſtand the number and greatneſs of our ſins; abating for ſome particulars which are ſlipp'd out of our memory, and for

ſins

ſins of ignorance, and dayly infirmities, which are innumerable. By all which we may ſee, what vile wretches and grievous offenders we have been: eſpecially if we take into conſideration the ſeveral heavy circumſtances of our ſins, which do above meaſure aggravate them; the heinouſneſs of many of them, as to their nature, and the injurious conſequences of them to the perſon, or eſtate, or reputation of our neighbour; their having been committed againſt the clear knowledg of our duty, againſt the frequent checks and convictions of our conſciences, telling us when we did them that we did amiſs; againſt ſo many motions and ſuggeſtions of Gods Holy Spirit, ſo many admonitions and reproofs from others; and contrary to our own moſt ſerious vows and reſolutions, renewed at ſeveral times, eſpecially upon the receiving of the bleſſed Sacrament, and in times of ſickneſs and diſtreſs: and all this notwithſtanding the plaineſt declarations of Gods will to the contrary, notwithſtanding the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men; notwithſtanding the cruel ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins, and the moſt merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood: Add to

this

this the ſcandal of our wicked lives to our holy Religion, the ill example of them to the corrupting and debauching of others, the affront of them to the Divine Authority, and the horrible ingratitude of them to the mercy and goodneſs and patience of God, to which we have ſuch infinite obligations. Thus we ſhould ſet our ſins in order before our eyes, with the ſeveral aggravations of them.

2. A hearty *trouble* and *ſorrow* for ſin; *I thought on my ways*, that is, I laid my ſins ſadly to heart. And ſurely whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and ſenſibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but hang down our heads, and ſmite upon our breaſts, and be in pain and heavineſs at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are very different, and therefore I do not ſay that tears are abſolutely neceſſary to repentance, but they do very well become it; and a thorough ſenſe of ſin will almoſt melt the moſt hard and obdurate diſpoſition, and fetch water out of a very rock. To be ſure, the conſideration of our ways ſhould cauſe inward trouble and confuſion in our minds. The leaſt we can do when we have done amiſs, is to be ſorry for it, to condemn

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our own folly, and to be full of indignation and diſpleaſure againſt our ſelves for what we have done, and to reſolve never to do the like again. And let us make ſure that our trouble and ſorrow for ſin have this effect, *to make us leave our ſins*; and then we ſhall need to be the leſs ſolicitous about the degrees and outward expreſſions of it.

3. *A ſerious conſideration of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe.* That ſin is the ſtain and blemiſh of our natures, the reproach of our reaſon and underſtanding, the diſeaſe and the deformity of our ſouls, the great enemy of our peace, the cauſe of all our fears and troubles: That whenever we do a wicked action, we go contrary to the cleareſt dictates of our reaſon and conſcience, to our plain and true intereſt, and to the ſtrongeſt tyes and obligations of duty and gratitude. And which renders it yet more unreaſonable, ſin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themſelves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or no; a man may be poor or ſick by misfortune, but no man is wicked and vitious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakneſs, by ſuffering our ſelves to be hurried away by every fooliſh luſt and paſſion, to do things which we know

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to be prejudicial and hurtful to our ſelves; and ſo baſe and unworthy in themſelves, that we are aſhamed to do them, not only in the preſence of a wiſe man, but even of a child or a fool. So that if ſin were followed with no other puniſhment, beſides the guilt of having done a ſhameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himſelf a fool and a beaſt; one would not be falſe and unjuſt, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reaſon, yet out of meer greatneſs and generoſity of mind, out of reſpect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reaſon and underſtanding. For let Witty men ſay what they will in defence of their vices, there are ſo many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of ſin, that the matter is paſt all denial: Men are generally galled and uneaſie at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it; they are aſhamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked whenever they are upbraided with it; and 'tis very obſervable, that though the greater part of the world was always bad, and vice hath ever had more ſervants and followers to cry it up, yet never was there any Age ſo degenerate, in which Vice could get the better of Vertue in point of general

eſteem

eſteem and reputation: Even they whoſe wills have been moſt enſlaved to ſin, could never yet ſo far bribe and corrupt their underſtandings, as to make them give full approbation to it.

4. *A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life.* And theſe are ſo ſad and dreadful, and the danger of them ſo evident, and ſo perpetually threatning us, that no temptation can be ſufficient to excuſe a man to himſelf and his own reaſon for venturing upon them. A principal point of wiſdom is to look to the End of things; not only to conſider the preſent pleaſure and advantage of any thing, but alſo the ill conſequences of it for the future; and to ballance them one againſt the other.

Now ſin in its own nature tends to make men miſerable. It certainly cauſes trouble and diſquiet of mind: And to a conſiderate man, that knows how to value the eaſe and ſatisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument againſt ſin, than to conſider that the forſaking of it is the only way to find reſt to our ſouls.

Beſides this, every vice is naturally attended with ſome particular miſchief and inconvenience, which maketh it even in this life a puniſhment to it ſelf; and commonly,

monly, the providence of God and his juſt judgment upon ſinners ſtrikes in to heighten the miſchievous conſequences of a ſinful courſe. This we have repreſented in the Parable of the Prodigal; his riotous courſe of life did naturally and of it ſelf bring him to want, but the providence of God likewiſe concurred to render his condition more miſerable, *at the ſame time there aroſe a mighty famine in the land*; ſo that he did not only want wherewithall to ſupply himſelf, but was cut off from all hopes of relief from the abundance and ſuperfluity of others. Sin brings many miſeries upon us, and God many times ſends more and greater than ſin brings; and the further we go on in a ſinful courſe, the more miſeries and the greater difficulties we involve our ſelves in.

But all theſe are but light and inconſiderable, in compariſon of the dreadful miſeries of another world; to the danger whereof, every man that lives a wicked life doth every moment expoſe himſelf. So that if we could conquer ſhame, and had ſtupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our conſciences for them, and the temporal miſchiefs and inconveniences of them; though for the preſent gratifying of our luſts we could brook and diſpenſe

ſpenſe with all theſe, yet the conſideration of the end and iſſue of a ſinful courſe, is an invincible objection againſt it, and never to be anſwered; though the violence of our ſenſual appetities and inclinations ſhould be able to bear down all temporal conſiderations whatſoever, yet methinks the intereſt of our everlaſting happineſs ſhould lye near our hearts, the conſideration of another world ſhould mightily amaze and ſtartle us; the horrors of eternal darkneſs, and the diſmal thought of being miſerable for ever, ſhould effectually diſcourage any man from a wicked life. And this danger continually threatens the ſinner, and may, if God be not merciful to him, happen to ſurprize him the next moment. And can we make too much haſte, to flye from ſo great and apparent a danger? When will we think of ſaving our ſelves, if not when (for ought we know) we are upon the very brink of ruine, and juſt ready to drop into deſtruction?

5. Upon this naturally follows, *a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe.* And neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument, and doth rather compel than perſwade: And after it is once evident leaves no

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place for further deliberation. And the greater the neceſſity is, it is ſtill the more cogent argument. For whatever is neceſſary, is ſo in order to ſome end; and the greater the end, the greater is the neceſſity of the means without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and laſt end of all Reaſonable creatures is happineſs, and therefore whatever is neceſſary in order to that, hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs, till we have left our ſins, for *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always enforce a preſent change; becauſe men hope they may continue in their ſins, and remedy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects, that there is no venturing upon it: And in matters of greateſt concernment wiſe men will run no hazards, if they can help it. *David* was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life for one moment; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

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This day, *this* hour, for ought we know, may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with God. Therefore we ſhould make haſte out of this dangerous ſtate, as *Lot* did out of *Sodom*, leſt fire and brimſtone overtake us. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the next moment, hath a great deal of reaſon to ſeize upon the preſent opportunity. While we are *lingering* in our ſins, if God be not merciful to us, we ſhall be conſumed. Therefore *make haſte*, ſinner, and *eſcape for thy life, leſt evil overtake thee.*

6. Laſtly, *An apprehenſion of the poſſibility of making this change.* God who deſigned us for happineſs at firſt, and after we had made a forfeiture of it by ſin, was pleaſed to reſtore us again to the capacity of it by the Redemption of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, hath made nothing neceſſary to our happineſs that is impoſſible for us to do, either of our ſelves, or by the aſſiſtance of that grace which he is ready to afford us, if we heartily beg it of him. For that is poſſible to us, which we may do by the aſſiſtance of another, if we may have that aſſiſtance for asking: And God hath promiſed to *give his holy Spirit to them that ask him.* So that notwithſtanding

the great corruption and weakneſs of our natures, ſince the grace of God which brings ſalvation hath appeared, it is not abſolutely out of our power to leave our ſins, and to turn to God: For that may truly be ſaid to be in our power, which God hath promiſed to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our ſelves.

So that there is nothing on Gods part to hinder this change. He hath ſolemnly declared, that he ſincerly deſires it, and that he is ready to aſſiſt our good reſolutions to this purpoſe. And moſt certainly, when he tell us, that *he hath no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs and live*; that *he would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledg of the truth*; that *he would not that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance*, He means plainly as he ſaith, and doth not ſpeak to us with any private reſerve or nice diſtinction between his ſecret and revealed will, that is, he doth not decree one thing, and declare the contrary. So far is it from this, that if a ſinner entertain ſerious thoughts of returning to God, and do but once move towards him, how ready is he to receive

receive him! This is, in a very lively manner, deſcribed to us in the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*, who when he was returning home, and *was yet a great way off*, what haſte doth his Father make to meet him? *he ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran.* And if there be no impediment on Gods part, why ſhould there be any on ours? One would think all the doubt and difficulty ſhould be on the other ſide, Whether God would be pleaſed to ſhew mercy to ſuch great offenders as we have been. But the buſineſs doth not ſtick there. And will we be miſerable by our own choice, when the Grace of God hath put it into our power to be happy? I have done with the firſt thing, The courſe which *David* here took for the reforming of his life; *I thought on my ways.* I proceed to the

II. *The ſucceſs of this courſe.* It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation. *I turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies; I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And if we conſider the matter throughly, and have but patience to reaſon out the caſe with our ſelves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to ſome iſſue, the concluſion muſt naturally be, the quitting of that evil and dange-

rous courſe in which we have lived. For ſin and conſideration can not long dwell together. Did but men conſider what ſin is, they would have ſo many unanſwerable objections againſt it, ſuch ſtrong fears and jealouſies of the miſerable iſſue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not ſay, that this change is perfectly made at once. A ſtate of ſin and holineſs are not like two Ways that are juſt parted by a line, ſo as a man may ſtep out of the one full into the other; but they are like two Ways that lead to two very diſtant places, and conſequently are at a good diſtance from one another, and the farther any man hath travelled in the one, the further he is from the other; ſo that it requires time and pains to paſs from the one to the other. It ſometimes ſo happens, that ſome perſons are by a mighty conviction and reſolution, and by a very extraordinary and over-powering degree of Gods grace, almoſt perfectly reclaimed from their ſins at once, and all of a ſudden *tranſlated out of the Kingdom of darkneſs into the Kingdom of his dear Son.* And thus it was with many of the firſt Converts to Chriſtianity;

Chriſtianity; as their prejudices againſt the Chriſtian Religion were ſtrong and violent, ſo the holy Spirit of God was pleaſed to work mightily in them that believed. But in the uſual and ſetled methods of Gods grace, evil habits are maſtered and ſubdued by degrees, and with a great deal of conflict, and many times after they are routed they rally and make head again; and 'tis a great while before the contrary habits of grace and virtue are grown up to any conſiderable degree of ſtrength and maturity, and before a man come to that confirmed ſtate of goodneſs, that he may be ſaid to have conquered and mortified his luſts. But yet this ought not to diſcourage us. For ſo ſoon as we have ſeriouſly begun this change, we are in a good way, and all our endeavours will have the acceptance of good beginnings, and God will be ready to help us; and if we purſue our advantages, we ſhall every day gain ground, and the work will grow eaſier upon our hands; and we who moved at firſt with ſo much ſlowneſs and difficulty, ſhall after a while be enabled to run the ways of Gods commandments with pleaſure and delight.

I have done with the two things I pro-

pounded to ſpeak to from theſe words, The *courſe* here preſcribed, and the *ſucceſs* of it. And now to perſwade men to take this *courſe*, I ſhall offer two or three Arguments.

1. That Conſideration is the proper act of Reaſonable creatures. This argument God himſelf uſes, to bring men to a conſideration of their evil ways, *Iſa.* 46.8, *Remember, and ſhew your ſelves men; bring it again to mind, O ye tranſgreſſors.* To conſider our ways, and to call our ſins to remembrance, is to ſhew our ſelves men. 'Tis the great fault and infelicity of a great many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their preſent inclinations and appetites, without any conſideration of the future conſequences of things, and without fear of any thing, but of a preſent and ſenſible danger; like Brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view, and juſt ready to fall upon them: Whereas to a prudent and conſiderate man, a good or evil in reverſion is capable of as true an eſtimation, proportionably to the greatneſs and diſtance of it, as if it were really preſent. And what do we think has God given us our reaſon and underſtandings for, but to foreſee evils at a diſtance,

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and to prevent them; to provide for our future ſecurity and happineſs, to look up *to God our Maker, who hath taught us more than the Beaſts of the earth, and made us wiſer than the Fowls of heaven*; but to conſider what we do, and what we ought to do, and what makes moſt for our future and laſting intereſt, and what againſt it? What can a Beaſt do worſe, than to act without any conſideration and deſign, than to purſue his preſent inclination without any apprehenſion of true danger? The moſt dull and ſtupid of all the brute creatures can hardly exerciſe leſs reaſon than this comes to. So that for a man not to conſider his ways, is to the very beſt intents and purpoſes, to be *without underſtanding, and like the beaſts that periſh.*

2. This is the end of Gods patience and long-ſuffering towards us, to bring us to conſideration. The great deſign of Gods *goodneſs*, is to *lead men to repentance. He winks at the ſins of men, that they may repent.* He bears long with us, and delays the puniſhment of our ſins, and doth not execute judgment ſpeedily, becauſe he is loth to ſurprize men into deſtruction; becauſe he would give them the liberty of ſecond thoughts, time

to

to reflect upon themſelves, and to conſider what they have done, and to reaſon themſelves into repentance. *Conſider this all ye that forget God, leſt* his patience turn into fury, and *he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

3. Conſideration is that which we muſt all come to, one time or other. Time will come, when we ſhall conſider and cannot help it; when we ſhall not be able to divert our thoughts from thoſe things, which we are now ſo loth to think upon. Our conſciences will take their opportunity, to bring our ways to remembrance, when ſome great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the Prodigal, when he was brought to the very laſt extremity, and *was ready to periſh for hunger*, then *he came to himſelf.* When we come to die, then we ſhall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough; And how glad would we then be, that we had time to conſider them? And perhaps while we are wiſhing for more time, Eternity will ſwallow us up. To be ſure, in the other world, a great part of the miſery of wicked men will conſiſt in furious reflections upon themſelves, and the evil actions of their lives. 'Tis ſaid of the

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Rich voluptuous man in the *Parable*, that *in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments*; as if he had never conſidered and bethought himſelf till that time. But alas! it will then be too late to conſider: For then conſideration will do us no good; it will ſerve to no other purpoſe, but to aggravate our miſery, and to multiply our ſtings, and to give new life and rage to thoſe Vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much a wiſer courſe would it be, to conſider theſe things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redreſs them, and avoid the diſmal conſequences of them, than when our caſe is deſperate and paſt remedy?

And now what can I ſay more, to perſwade every one of us to a conſideration of our *own ways?* We are generally apt to buſie our ſelves in obſerving the errors and miſcarriages of our neighbours, and are forward to mark and cenſure the faults and follies of other men; but how few deſcend into themſelves, and turn their eyes inward, and ſay, *What have I done?* 'Tis an excellent ſaying of *Antoninus* the great *Emperour* and *Philoſopher*, *No man was ever unhappy, for not prying into the actions*

ons and condition of other men; but that man is neceſſarily unhappy, who doth not obſerve himſelf, and conſider the ſtate of his own ſoul.

This is our proper work; and *now* is a proper ſeaſon for it, when we pretend to God and men to ſet apart a ſolemn time for the examination of our ſelves, and for a ſerious review of our lives, in order to humiliation and repentance, to the reforming and amendment of what is amiſs. And though we would venture to diſſemble with men, yet let us not diſſemble with God alſo: *For ſhall not he that pondereth the heart conſider it, and he that keepeth thy ſoul, ſhall not he know it; and ſhall not he render to every man according to his ways?*

I know it is a very unpleaſant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally ſo backward to it; becauſe it will of neceſſity give ſome preſent diſturbance to their minds. They whoſe lives have been very vicious, are ſo odious a ſight, ſo horrid a ſpectacle to themſelves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate Conſideration, and are ready to ſay to it, as the evil Spirit did in the Goſpel

ſpel to our Saviour, *What have I to do with thee? Art thou come to torment me before the time?* But let not this affright us from it; for whatever trouble it may cauſe at preſent, it is the only way to prevent the anguiſh and the torments of Eternity.

The things which I have offered to your conſideration, are of huge moment and importance. They do not concern your bodies and eſtates, but that which is more truly your ſelves, your immortal ſouls, the deareſt and moſt durable part of your ſelves: and they do not concern us for a little while, but for ever. Let me therefore beſpeak your moſt ſerious regard to them, in the words of *Moſes* to the people of *Iſrael*, after he had ſet the law of God before them, togeher with the bleſſings promiſed to obedience, and the terrible curſes threatned to the tranſgreſſion of it, *Deut.* 32. 46, *Set your hearts to the words which I teſtifie to you this day, for it is not a vain thing, becauſe it is your life.* Your life, your *eternal life* and happineſs depends upon it.

And beſides a tender regard to your ſelves and your own intereſts, which methinks every man, out of a natural de-

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ſire of being happy, and dread of being miſerable, ſhould be forward enough to conſider: Be pleaſed likewiſe to lay to heart the influence of your example upon others. I ſpeak now to a great many perſons, the eminence of whoſe rank and quality renders their examples ſo powerful, as to be able almoſt to give authority either to Virtue or Vice. People take their faſhions from you, as to the habits of their minds as well as their bodies. So that upon you chiefly depends the ruine or reformation of manners, our hopes or deſpair of a better world. What way ſoever you go, you are followed by troops. If you run any ſinful or dangerous courſe, you cannot *periſh alone in your iniquity*, but *thouſands will fall by your ſide, and ten thouſands at your right hands:* And on the contrary, 'tis very much in your power, and I hope in your wills and deſigns, to be the ſovereign reſtorers of piety and virtue to a degenerate Age. It is *our* part indeed to exhort men to their duty, but 'tis *you* that would be the powerful and effectual preachers of righteouſneſs: We may endeavour to make men proſelytes to vertue, but you would infallibly draw diſciples after you: We may try to perſwade, but you could

could certainly prevail, either to make men good, or to reſtrain them from being ſo bad.

Therefore conſider your ways, for the ſake of others as well as your ſelves. Conſider what you have done, and then conſider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of theſe things? And to help you forward in this work, it is not neceſſary that I ſhould rip up the vices of the Age, and ſet mens ſins in order before them. It is much better, that you your ſelves ſhould call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful Monitor and Witneſs in our own breaſts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this Monitor I refer you, and to the grace of God, to make theſe admonitions effectual.

Let us then every one of us, in the fear of God, *ſearch and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.* Let us *take to our ſelves words, and ſay* to God, with thoſe true Penitents in Scripture, *I have ſinned, what ſhall be done unto thee, O thou preſerver of men? Behold, I am vile, what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth, I will abhor my ſelf, and repent in*

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duſt and aſhes. For *ſurely it is meet to be ſaid unto God, I will not offend any more; that which I know not, teach thou me, and if I have done iniquity I will do no more. O that there were ſuch an heart in us! O that we were wiſe, that we underſtood this, that we would conſider our latter end!* And God, of his infinite mercy, inſpire into every one of our hearts this holy and happy reſolution; for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

Apr. 18th 1675.

Pſal. CXIX. 60.

I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

IN the words immediately going before, you have the courſe which *David* took for the reforming of his life, and the ſucceſs of that courſe; *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.* A ſerious reflection upon the paſt errors and miſcarriages of his life, produced the reformation of it. And you have a conſiderable circumſtance added in the words that I have now read to you, *viz.* that this reformation was ſpeedy and without delay, *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* Upon due conſideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the neceſſity of a change, he came to a reſolution of a better life, and immediately put this

reſolution in execution; and to declare how preſently and quickly he did it, he expreſſes it both affirmatively and negatively; after the manner of the *Hebrews*, who when they would ſay a thing with great certainty and *emphaſis*, are wont to expreſs it both ways, *I made haſte, and delayed not*; that is, I did with all imaginable ſpeed betake my ſelf to a better courſe.

And this is the natural effect of Conſideration; and the true cauſe why men delay ſo neceſſary a work, is, becauſe they ſtifle their reaſon, and ſuffer themſelves to be hurried into the embraces of preſent objects, and do not conſider their latter end, and what will be the ſad iſſue and event of a wicked life. For if men would take an impartial view of their lives, and but now and then reflect upon themſelves, and lay to heart the miſerable and fatal conſequences of a ſinful courſe, and think whither it will bring them at laſt, and that the end of theſe things will be death and miſery: If the carnal and ſenſual perſon would but look about him, and conſider how many have been ruin'd in the way that he is in, how many lye *ſlain and wounded in it, that it is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death,*

death, this would certainly give a check to him, and ſtop him in his courſe.

For it is not to be imagined, but that *that* man who hath duly conſidered what ſin is, the ſhortneſs of its pleaſures, and the eternity of its puniſhment, ſhould reſolve immediately to break off his ſins, and to live another kind of life. Would any man be intemperate and walk after the fleſh, would any man be unjuſt and defraud or oppreſs his neighbour, be prophane and live in the contempt of God and Religion, or allow himſelf in any wicked courſe whatſoever, that conſiders and believes a Judgment to come, and that becauſe of theſe things the terrible vengeance of God will one day fall upon the children of diſobedience? It is not credible, that men who apply themſelves ſeriouſly to the meditation of theſe matters, ſhould venture to continue in ſo imprudent and dangerous a courſe, or could by any temptation whatſoever be trained on one ſtep farther in a Way that does ſo certainly and viſibly lead to ruin and deſtruction.

So that my work at this time ſhall be, to endeavour to convince men of the monſtrous folly and unreaſonableneſs of delaying the reformation and amendment

of their lives; and to perſwade us to reſolve upon it, and having reſolved, to ſet about it immediately and without delay; in imitation of the good man here in the Text, *I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* And to this end, I ſhall

Firſt, Conſider the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them.

Secondly, I ſhall add ſome farther Conſiderations, to engage us effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily and without delay.

I. We will conſider a little the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and not only ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them, but that they are each of them a ſtrong reaſon and powerful argument to the contrary.

1. Many pretend, that they are abundantly convinced of the great neceſſity of leaving their ſins and betaking themſelves to a better courſe, and they fully intend to do ſo; only they cannot at preſent bring themſelves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper and

and diſpoſition, and then they reſolve by Gods grace to ſet about this work in good earneſt, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be fit to call this a Reaſon; I am ſure it is the greateſt cheat and deluſion that any man can put upon himſelf. For this plainly ſhews, that thou doſt not intend to do this, which thou art convinced is ſo neceſſary, but to put it off from day to day. For there is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithſtanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all reſpects better do it at preſent than hereafter, yet he ſtill puts it off. Whatever thou pretendeſt, this is a meer ſhift to get rid of a preſent trouble: It is like giving good words and making fair promiſes to a clamorous and importunate creditour, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conſcience that he intends not to pay him, and that he ſhall be leſs able to diſcharge the debt then, than he is at preſent. Whatever reaſons thou haſt againſt reforming thy life now, will ſtill remain and be in as full force hereafter, nay, probably ſtronger than they are at

preſent. Thou art unwilling now, and ſo thou wilt be hereafter, and in all likelihood much more unwilling. So that this reaſon will every day improve upon thy hands, and have ſo much the more ſtrength, by how much the longer thou continueſt in thy ſins. Thou haſt no reaſon in the world againſt the preſent time, but only that 'tis *preſent*; why, when hereafter comes to be preſent, the reaſon will be juſt the ſame. So that thy preſent unwillingneſs is ſo far from being a juſt reaſon againſt it, that 'tis a good reaſon the other way; becauſe thou art unwilling now, and like to be ſo, nay, more ſo hereafter; if thou intendeſt to do it at all, thou ſhouldſt ſet about it immediately, and without delay.

2. Another reaſon which men pretend for the delaying of this work, is the great difficulty and unpleaſantneſs of it. And it cannot be denied, but that there will be ſome bitterneſs and uneaſineſs in it, proportionably to the growth of evil habits, and the ſtrength of our luſts, and our greater or leſs progreſs and continuance in a ſinful courſe: So that we muſt make account of a ſharp conflict, of ſome pain and trouble in the making of this change, that it will coſt us ſome pangs

and

and throws before we be born again. For when nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected that it ſhould be reduced and brought back to its firſt ſtreightneſs without pain and violence.

But then it is to be conſidered, that how difficult and painful ſoever this work be, it is neceſſary; and that ſhould overrule all other conſiderations whatſoever: that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we muſt one time or other endure far greater, than thoſe which we now ſeek to avoid: that it is not ſo difficult as we imagine, but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove; if we were but once reſolved upon the work and ſeriouſly engaged in it, the greateſt part of the trouble were over; it is like the fear of children to go into the cold water, a faint trial increaſeth their fear and apprehenſion of it; but ſo ſoon as they have plunged into it, the trouble is over, and then they wonder why they were ſo much afraid. The main difficulty and unpleaſantneſs is in our firſt entrance into Religion; it preſently grows tolerable, and ſoon after eaſie, and after that by degrees ſo pleaſant and delightful, that the man would not for

for all the world return to his former evil ſtate and condition of life.

We ſhould conſider likewiſe, what is the true cauſe of all this trouble and difficulty; 'Tis our long continuance in a ſinful courſe that hath made us ſo loth to leave it; 'Tis the cuſtom of ſinning that renders it ſo troubleſome and uneaſie to men to do otherwiſe; 'Tis the greatneſs of our guilt, heightned and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, that doth ſo gall our conſciences, and fill our ſouls with ſo much terror; 'Tis becauſe we have gone ſo far in an evil way, that our retreat is become ſo difficult; and becauſe we have delayed this work ſo long, that we are now ſo unwilling to go about it; and conſequently, the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will encreaſe daily upon us. And all theſe conſiderations are ſo far from being a good reaſon for more delays, that they are a ſtrong argument to the contrary: Becauſe the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more ſo; and becauſe your delays have encreaſed the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

3. Another pretended encouragement to

to theſe delays, is the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears long with ſinners, and therefore there is no ſuch abſolute and urgent neceſſity of a ſpeedy repentance and reformation of our lives. Men have not the face to give this for a reaſon; but yet for all that, it lies at the bottom of many mens hearts: So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccleſ.* 8. 11, *Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.*

But it is not always thus. There are few of us but have ſeen ſeveral inſtances of Gods ſeverity to ſinners, and have known ſeveral perſons ſurprized by a ſudden hand of God, and cut off in the very act of ſin, without having the leaſt reſpite given them, without time or liberty ſo much as to ask God forgiveneſs, and to conſider either what they had done, or whither they were a-going. And this may be the caſe of any ſinner, and is ſo much the more likely to be thy caſe, becauſe thou doſt ſo boldly preſume upon the mercy and patience of God.

But if it were always thus, and thou wert ſure to be ſpared yet awhile longer;

ger; what can be more unreaſonable and diſingenuous, than to reſolve to be evil becauſe God is good, and becauſe he ſuffers ſo long, to ſin ſo much the longer, and becauſe he affords thee a ſpace of repentance, therefore to delay it and put it off to the laſt? The proper deſign of Gods goodneſs is to lead men to repentance, and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their ſins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

Theſe are the pretended reaſons and encouragements to men to delay their repentance and the reformation of their lives, and you ſee how groundleſs and unreaſonable they are; which was the *firſt* thing I propounded to ſpeak to.

II. I ſhall add ſome farther conſiderations, to engage men effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily, and without delay. And becauſe they are many, I ſhall inſiſt upon thoſe which are moſt weighty and conſiderable, without being very curious and ſolicitous about the method and order of them: For provided they be but effectual to the end of perſwaſion, it matters not how inartificially

cially they are rang'd and diſpoſed.

1. Conſider, that in matters of great and neceſſary concernment, and which muſt be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind, then irreſolution; to be undermined, where the caſe is ſo plain, and the neceſſity ſo urgent; to be always about doing that, which we are convinced muſt be done.

Victuros agimus ſemper, nec vivimus unquam.

We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to ſet about it. This is as if a man ſhould put off eating and drinking and ſleeping from one day and night to another, till he have ſtarved and deſtroyed himſelf. It ſeldom falls under any mans deliberation, whether he ſhould live or not, if he can chuſe; and if he cannot chuſe, 'tis in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more abſurd to deliberate, whether we ſhould live virtuouſly and religiouſly, ſoberly and righteouſly in the world; for *that* upon the matter is to conſult, whether a man ſhould be happy or not: Nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reaſon about it; and conſequently,

ſequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is ſo neceſſary in order to it.

2. Conſider, that Religion is a great and a long work; and asks ſo much time, that there is none left for the delaying of it. To begin with Repentance, which is commonly our firſt entrance into Religion: This alone is a great work, and is not only the buſineſs of a ſudden thought and reſolution, but of execution and action: 'Tis the abandoning of a ſinful courſe, which we cannot leave till we have in ſome degree maſtered our luſts; for ſo long as they are our maſters, like *Pharaoh* they will keep us in bondage, and *not let us go to ſerve the Lord.* The habits of ſin and vice are not to be plucked up and caſt off at once; as they have been long in contracting, ſo without a miracle, it will require a competent time to ſubdue them and get the victory over them: for they are conquered juſt by the ſame degrees that the habits of grace and virtue grow up and get ſtrength in us.

So that there are ſeveral duties to be done in Religion, and often to be repeated; many graces and virtues are to be long practiſed and exerciſed, before the

the contrary vices will be ſubdued, and before we arrive to a confirmed and ſetled ſtate of goodneſs; ſuch a ſtate as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the ſincerity of our reſolution and repentance, and of our good condition towards God. We have many luſts to mortifie, many paſſions to govern and bring into order; much good to do, to make what amends and reparation we can for the much evil we have done: We have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we ſhall be ſtrongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our nature, and the remaining power of ill habits and cuſtoms: and perhaps we have ſatisfaction and reſtitution to make for the many injuries we have done to others, in their perſons, or eſtates, or reputations: In a word, we have a *body of ſin* to put off, which clings cloſe to us, and is hard to part with; we have to *cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the fear of God*; to encreaſe and improve our graces and virtues; to *add to our faith knowledg*, and *temperance*, and *patience*, and *brotherly kindneſs*, and *charity*; and *to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are*

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by Jeſus Chriſt to the praiſe and glory of God: We have to be uſeful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous converſation; our *light is ſo to ſhine before men, that others may ſee our good works, and glorifie our father which is in heaven.*

And do we think all this is to be done in an inſtant, and requires no time? That we may delay and put off to the laſt, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of ſickneſs and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing, when *the ſpirit of a man* can hardly *bear the infirmities* of nature, much leſs a guilty conſcience and *a wounded ſpirit?* Do we think that when the day hath been idlely ſpent and ſquandered away by us, that we ſhall be fit to work when the night and darkneſs comes? When our underſtanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will crooked, and by a long cuſtom of ſinning obſtinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in Religion? what reaſonable or acceptable ſervice can we then perform to God? when our candle is juſt ſinking into the ſocket, how ſhall *our light ſo ſhine before men, that others may ſee our good works?*

Alas!

Alas! the longeſt life is no more than ſufficient for a man to reform himſelf in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiſs; to put our ſouls into a good poſture and preparation for another world, to train up our ſelves for eternity, and to make our ſelves *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light.*

3. Conſider, what a deſperate hazard we run by theſe delays. Every delay of repentance is a venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we ſhall have time for it, and if we have time, whether we ſhall have a heart to it, and the aſſiſtance of Gods grace to go thorough with it. God indeed hath been graciouſly pleaſed to promiſe pardon to repentance, but he hath no-where promiſed life and leiſure, the aids of his grace and holy Spirit to thoſe who put off their repentance: He hath no-where promiſed acceptance to meer ſorrow and trouble for ſin, without *fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life:* He hath no-where promiſed to receive them to mercy and favour, who only give him good words, and are at laſt contented to condeſcend ſo far to him, as to promiſe to leave their ſins when they can

keep them no longer. Many have gone thus far in times of affliction and ſickneſs, as to be awakened to a great ſenſe of their ſins, and to be mightily troubled for their wicked lives, and to make ſolemn promiſes and profeſſions of becoming better; and yet upon their deliverance and recovery all hath vaniſhed and come to nothing, and their *righteouſneſs hath been as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which paſſeth away:* And why ſhould any man, meerly upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himſelf in a better condition than thoſe perſons, who have done as much, and gone as far as he; and there is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tryed, and proved inſincere, but the *death-bed repentance* never came to a tryal; and yet for all that, God knows whether it were ſincere or not, and how it would have proved if the man had lived longer. Why ſhould any man, for offering up to God the meer refuſe and dregs of his life, and the days *which himſelf hath no pleaſure in*, expect to receive the reward of eternal life and happineſs at his hands?

But though we do not deſign to delay this work ſo long, yet ought we to conſider,

conſider, that all delays in a matter of this conſequence are extreamly dangerous; becauſe we put off a buſineſs of the greateſt concernment to the future; and in ſo doing, put it to the hazard whether ever it ſhall be done: For the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is paſt. Indeed if we could arreſt time, and ſtrike off the nimble wheels of his Charriot, and like *Joſhua* bid the Sun ſtand ſtill, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occaſion for it; this were ſomething to excuſe our delay, or at leaſt to mitigate and abate the folly and unreaſonableneſs of it: But this we cannot do: It is in our power, under the influence of Gods grace and holy Spirit, to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to live till to morrow; and who would part with an eſtate in hand, which he may preſently enter upon the poſſeſſion of, for an uncertain reverſion? And yet thus we deal in the great and everlaſting concernments of our ſouls; we trifle away the preſent opportunities of ſalvation, and vainly promiſe to our ſelves the future; we let go that which is in our power, and fondly diſpoſe of that which is out of our power, and in the hands of God.

Lay hold then upon the preſent opportunities, and look upon every action thou doſt, and every opportunity of doing any, as poſſibly thy laſt; for ſo it may prove, for any thing thou canſt tell to the contrary. If a mans life lay at ſtake, and he had but one throw for it, with what care and with what concernment would he manage that action? What thou art doing next may, for ought thou knoweſt, be for thy life, and for all eternity. So much of thy life is moſt certainly paſt, and God knows thou haſt yet done little or nothing towards the ſecuring of thy future happineſs: It is not certain, how much or how little is remaining, therefore be ſure to make the beſt uſe of that little which may be left, and wiſely to manage the laſt ſtake.

4. Seeing the delay of repentance doth mainly rely upon the hopes and encouragement of a future repentance, let us conſider a little how unreaſonable theſe hopes are, and how abſurd the encouragement is which men take from them. To ſin in hopes that hereafter we ſhall repent, is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall be one day mightily aſhamed of it, that we ſhall one time or other be heartily grieved and troubled that we have done

done it: It is to do a thing in hopes that we ſhall afterwards condemn our ſelves for it, and wiſh a thouſand times we had never done it; in hopes that we ſhall be full of horrour at the thoughts of what we have done, and ſhall treaſure up ſo much guilt in our conſciences as will make us a terror to our ſelves, and be ready to drive us even to deſpair and diſtraction. And is this a reaſonable hope? Is this a fitting encouragement for a wiſe man to give to himſelf, to any action? And yet this is plainly the true meaning of mens going on in their ſins, in hopes that hereafter they ſhall repent of them.

5. If you be ſtill reſolved to delay this buſineſs, and put it off at preſent; conſider well with your ſelves, how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the laſt; not till ſickneſs come, and death make his approaches to you. This is next to madneſs, to venture all upon ſuch an after game. 'Tis juſt as if a man ſhould be content to be ſhipwrackt, in hope that he ſhall afterwards eſcape by a plank, and get ſafe to ſhore. But I hope none are ſo unreaſonable; yet I fear that many have a mind to put it off to old age, though they do not care to ſay ſo. *Seneca*

expoſtulates excellently with this ſort of men; "Who ſhould enſure thy life till "that time? Who ſhall paſs his word for "thee, that the providence of God will "ſuffer all things to happen and fall out, "juſt as thou haſt deſigned and forecaſt "them? Art thou not aſhamed to reſerve "the reliques of thy life for thy ſelf, and "to ſet apart only that time to be wiſe "and virtuous in, which is good for no-"thing? How late is it then to begin "to live well, when thy life is almoſt at "an end? What a ſtupid forgetfulneſs is it "of our mortality, to put off good re-"ſolutions to the fiftieth or ſixtieth year "of our age, and to reſolve to begin to "do better at *that* time of life, to which "but very few perſons have reached?

But perhaps thou art not altogether ſo unreaſonable, but deſireſt only to reſpite this work, till the firſt heat of youth and luſt be over, till the cooler and more conſiderate part of thy life come on: *that* perhaps thou thinkeſt may be the fitteſt and moſt convenient ſeaſon. But ſtill we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that ſeaſon may never be: however, to be ſure it is much more in our power, by the aſſiſtance of Gods grace, which is never wanting to the ſincere endeavours

deavours of men, to conquer our luſts now, and to reſiſt the moſt heady and violent temptations to vice, than either to ſecure the future time, or to recover that which is once paſt and gone.

Some ſeem yet more reaſonable, and are content to come lower, and deſire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? why till to morrow? To morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that thou wilt in all probability be more unwilling and indiſpoſed *then.*

So that there is no *future* time which any man can reaſonably pitch upon. All delay in this caſe is dangerous, and as ſenſeleſs as the expectation of the *Ideot*, deſcribed by the *Poet*; who being come to the river ſide, and intending to paſs over, ſtays till all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry paſſage for him.

———————*at ille*
Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis ævum.

But the river runs, and runs, and will run, and if he ſhould ſtay a thouſand years, will never be the nearer being dry.

So that if the man muſt go over, and there be a neceſſity for it, (as there is for Repentance) the only wiſe reſolution to be taken in this caſe, is to wade or ſwim over as well as he can, becauſe the matter will never be mended by tarrying.

6. *Laſtly*, conſider what an unſpeakable happineſs it is, to have our minds ſettled in that condition, that we may without fear and amazement, nay, with comfort and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us, and the general Judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of; for *of that day and hour knoweth no man:* And theſe are two terrible things; and nothing can free us from the terror of them, but a good conſcience; and a good conſcience is only to be had, either by innocence, or by repentance and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himſelf; and can think of death and judgment, without dread and aſtoniſhment. For *the ſting of death is ſin*; and the terror of the great day only concerns thoſe, who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and would not be perſwaded, neither

by

by the mercies of God, nor by the fear of his judgments, to repent and turn to him: But if we have truely forſaken our ſins, and do ſincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the Laws and Commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will theſe things be to us: For *bleſſed is that ſervant, whom his Lord when he comes ſhall find ſo doing.* Let us therefore, as ſoon as poſſibly we can, put our ſelves into this poſture and preparation; according to that advice of our bleſſed Saviour, *Luke* 12. 35, 36, *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye your ſelves like unto men that wait for their Lord.*

And now I hope that enough hath been ſaid, to convince men of the great unreaſonableneſs and folly of theſe delays; nay, I believe, moſt men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their conſciences call them fools a thouſand times for it: But O that I knew what to ſay, that might prevail with men, and effectually perſwade them to do that, which they are ſo abundantly convinced is ſo neceſſary.

And

And here I might addreſs my ſelf to the ſeveral ages of perſons. You that are *young*, and have hitherto been in a good meaſure innocent, may prevent the Devil, and by an early piety give God the firſt poſſeſſion of your ſouls; and by this means, never be put to the trouble of ſo great and ſolemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life: You may do a glorious, I had almoſt ſaid a meritorious thing, in cleaving ſtedfaſtly to God, and reſolving to ſerve him, when you are ſo importunately courted, and ſo hotly aſſaulted by the Devil and the World. However, you may not live to be old; therefore upon that conſideration begin the work preſently, and make uſe of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You that are grown up to *ripeneſs of years*, and are in the full vigor of your age; *you* are to be put in mind, that the heat and inconſiderateneſs of youth is now paſt and gone; that reaſon and conſideration are now in their perfection and ſtrength; that this is the very age of prudence and diſcretion, of wiſdom and warineſs: So that now is the

the proper time for you to be ſerious, and wiſely to ſecure your future happineſs.

As for thoſe that are *old*, *they* methinks ſhould need no body to admoniſh them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time paſt of their lives is too much to have ſpent in ſin and folly. 'There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your Sun is certainly going down and neer its ſetting; therefore you ſhould quicken your pace, conſidering that your journey is never the ſhorter becauſe you have but little time to perform it in. Alas man! thou art juſt ready to dye, and haſt thou not yet begun to live? Are thy paſſions and luſts yet unſubdued, and have they had no other mortification than what age hath given them? 'Tis ſtrange to ſee, how in the very extremities of old age, many men are as if they had ſtill a thouſand years to live, and make no preparation for death, though it dogs them at the heels, and is juſt come up to them and ready to give them the fatal ſtroke.

Therefore let us not put off this neceſſary

ceſſary work of reforming our ſelves, in what part and age of our lives ſoever we be. *To day, whilſt it is called to day, leaſt any of you be hardened thorough the decitfulneſs of ſin.* Nay, to day is with the lateſt to begin this work, had we been wiſe we would have begun it ſooner. 'Tis Gods infinite mercy to us, that it is not quite too late, that the day of Gods patience is not quite expired, and the door ſhut againſt us. Therefore do not defer your repentance to the next ſolemn time, to the next occaſion of receiving the bleſſed Sacrament: Do not ſay, I will then reform and become a new man, after *that* I will take leave of my luſts and ſin no more. For let us make what haſte we can, we cannot poſſibly make too much.

——*properat vivere nemo ſatis.*

No man makes haſte enough to be good, to *ceaſe to do evil, and to learn to do well.* Be as quick as we will, life will be too nimble for us, and go on faſter than our work does; and death will go nigh to prevent us, and ſurprize us unawares.

Do

Do, do *ſinner*; abuſe and neglect thy ſelf yet a little while longer, till the time of regarding thy ſoul and working out thy own ſalvation be at an end, and all the opportunities of minding that great concernment be ſlipped out of thy hands, never to be recovered, never to be called back again; no, not by thy moſt earneſt wiſhes and deſires, by thy moſt fervent prayers and tears; and thou be brought into the condition of *prophane Eſau*, who for once deſpiſing the Bleſſing, loſt it for ever; *and found no place of repentance, though he ſought it carefully with tears.*

To conclude: Art thou convinced, that thy eternal happineſs depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Why then, do but behave thy ſelf in this caſe, as thou and all prudent men are wont to do in matters which thou canſt not but acknowledg to be of far leſs concernment. If a man be travelling to ſuch a place, ſo ſoon as he finds himſelf out of the way, he preſently ſtops and makes towards the right way, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther: If a man be ſick, he will be well preſently

ſently if he can, and not put it off to the future: Moſt men will gladly take the firſt opportunity that preſents it ſelf, of being rich or great; every man almoſt catches at the very firſt offers of a great place or a good purchaſe, and ſecures them preſently if he can, leaſt the opportunity be gone, and another ſnatch theſe things from him. Do thou thus ſo much more, in matters ſo much greater. Return from the error of thy way, be well, ſave thy ſelf, as ſoon as poſſibly thou canſt. When happineſs preſents it ſelf to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to morrow. Perhaps thou mayeſt never be ſo fairly offered again; perhaps the day of ſalvation may not come again to morrow; nay, perhaps *to thee* to morrow may never come. But if we were ſure that happineſs would come again, yet why ſhould we put it off? Does any man know how to be ſafe and happy to day, and can he find in his heart to tarry till to morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience, give every one of us the wiſdom and grace, to *know* and to do *in this our day, the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes;*

eyes; for the ſake of our bleſſed Saviour and Redeemer; *To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory now and for ever.* Amen.

A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

Febr. 25th 167½.

1 John III. 10.

In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.

IT is certainly a matter of the greateſt conſequence to us, both in order to our preſent peace and future happineſs, truly to underſtand our ſpiritual ſtate and condition, and whether we belong to God and be his Children or not: And it is not ſo difficult as is commonly imagined to arrive at this knowledg, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with our ſelves; For the Text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it, *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of*

the Devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.

From which words I ſhall endeavour, by Gods aſſiſtance, to lay men open to themſelves, and to repreſent to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every mans ſerious conſideration, to make the beſt uſe of it.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter, to conſider briefly the occaſion of theſe words. And this will beſt appear by attending ſtedfaſtly to the main ſcope and deſign of this *Epiſtle*. And I think that no man that reads it with attention can doubt, but that it is particularly deſigned againſt the impious Sect of the *Gnoſticks*; who, as the *Fathers* tell us, ſprang from *Simon Magus*, and pretended to extraordinary *knowledg* and illumination, from whence they had the name of *Gnoſticks*; but notwithſtanding this glittering pretence, they did allow themſelves in all manner of impious and vicious practice, *turning the grace of God into laſciviouſneſs*, as St. *Jude* ſpeaks of them. And that St. *John* particularly aims at this ſort of men is very evident from the frequent and plain alluſions throughout this *Epiſtle*, to thoſe Names

and

and Titles which this Sect assumed to themselves, as *Chap.* 2. *ver.* 4, *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* And *vers.* 9, *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.* Which passages, and many more in this *Epistle*, do plainly refer to the pretences of this *Sect*, to more than ordinary *knowledg* and *illumination* in the mysteries of Religion; notwithstanding, they did so notoriously contradict these glorious pretences by the impiety of their lives, and particularly by their hatred and enmity to their fellow-Christians. For, as the *ancient Fathers* tell us, they pretended that whatever they did, they could not sin: And this our *Apostle* intimates in the beginning of this *Epistle*, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.* And they held it lawful to renounce Christianity to avoid persecution; and not only so, but also to joyn with the Heathen in persecuting the Christians; which seems to be the reason why the *Apostle* so often taxeth them for *hatred to their Brethren*; and calls them *Murderers*.

Now to shew the inconsistence of these

principles and practiſes with Chriſtianity, the Apoſtle uſeth many arguments; amongſt which, he particularly inſiſteth upon this, That nothing is more eſſential to a *Diſciple of Chriſt* and a *Child of God* (by which Titles Chriſtians were commonly known), than to abſtain from the practiſe of all ſin and wickedneſs; *verſ.* 6. of this *Chap. Whoſoever abideth in him ſinneth not; whoſoever ſinneth hath not ſeen him, neither known him,* (whatever knowledg they might pretend to, it was evident they were deſtitute of the true knowledg of God and his Son *Jeſus Chriſt*) and *verſ.* 7, *Little Children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he is righteous*; and *verſ.* 8, *He that committeth ſin is of the Devil*; and *verſ.* 9, *Whoſoever is born of God doth not commit ſin*; let men pretend what they will, wickedneſs is a plain mark and character of one that belongs to the *Devil*; as on the contrary, righteouſneſs is an evidence of a *Child of God, In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil*, &c.

I ſhall briefly explain the words, and then conſider the matter contained in them.

By

By the children of God, and the children of the Devil, are meant good and bad men; It being uſual in the phraſe of Scripture, to call perſons or things which partake of ſuch a nature or quality, the children of thoſe who are eminently endued with that nature and diſpoſition. Thus they who are of the faith of *Abraham*, and do the works of *Abraham*, are called *Abraham's children:* In like manner, thoſe who in their diſpoſition and actions imitate God, are called *the children of God*; and on the contrary, thoſe that addict themſelves to ſin and impiety are counted of another race and deſcent, they reſemble the Devil, and belong to him as the Chief and Head of that Faction.

By *righteouſneſs*, is here meant univerſal goodneſs and conformity to the Law of God, in oppoſition to ſin which is the tranſgreſſion of that Law.

By being *manifeſt*, is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really diſtinguiſhed; ſo that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what Party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words, which is to give us a

certain character, and mark of distinction between a good and bad man; ἐν τούτῳ, *by this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

In the management of the following Discourse, I shall proceed in this method.

First, We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down; *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledg of his spiritual estate and condition. *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil.*

Thirdly, I shall enquire whence it comes to pass, that notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here in the Text, *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God*; which implies likewise on the contrary, that *whosoever doth righteousness, is of God.* Now in the strictest sense of this

this phraſe, he only who lives in all the commandments of God blameleſs, can be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs:* But in this ſenſe *there is none that doth righteouſneſs, no not one,* and conſequently none could be the Children of God; but the Text ſuppoſes ſome to be ſo, and therefore by *doing righteouſneſs* the *Apoſtle* muſt neceſſarily be underſtood to mean ſomething that is ſhort of perfect and unſinning obedience. So that the queſtion is, What *doing of righteouſneſs* is ſufficient to denominate a man a *Child of God,* and to put him into a ſtate of grace and favour with Him.

And I do not intend nicely to ſtate this matter. 'Tis not perhaps poſſible to be done; nothing being more difficult, than to determine the very utmoſt bounds and limits of things, and to tell exactly and juſt to a point where the line of difference between Virtue and Vice, between the ſtate of a good and bad man is to be placed: And if it could be done, it would be of no great uſe; for I take it to be no part of my buſineſs to tell men how many faults they may have, and how little goodneſs, and yet be *the children of God:* but rather to acquaint them, what degrees of holineſs and goodneſs

neſs are neceſſary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good eſtate towards God; and then to perſwade them, in order to their peace and aſſurance, to endeavour after ſuch degrees.

Wherefore to ſtate the buſineſs ſo far as is neceſſary to give men a ſufficient knowledg of their condition, I ſhall briefly conſider who they are that in the Apoſtles ſenſe may be ſaid to be *doers of righteouſneſs*, or *not doers of it*. And becauſe the *Apoſtle* lays down the Rule negatively, I ſhall therefore

In the *firſt* place, enquire who they are that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be ſaid *not to do righteouſneſs*.

1. They that live in the general courſe of a wicked life; in the practiſe of great and known ſins, as injuſtice, intemperance, filthy and ſenſual luſts, profane neglect and contempt of God and Religion; ſo that by the whole courſe and tenour of their actions, it is plain beyond all denial that *there is no fear of God before their eyes*. Concerning theſe the caſe is ſo very evident, that it ſeems too mild and gentle an expreſſion to call them *not doers of righteouſneſs*.

2. They who live in the habitual practice

ctice of any one known ſin, or in the neglect of any conſiderable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil ſtate.

3. They who are guilty of the ſingle act of a very heinous and notorious crime; as a deliberate act of blaſphemy, of murther, perjury, fraud or oppreſſion, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one ſingle act of ſin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general courſe of the mans life is contrary; yet the ſingle acts of ſome ſorts of ſins are ſo crying and heinous, and do ſo ſtare every mans conſcience in the face, that they are juſtly eſteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits of an inferiour kind; becauſe they do almoſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a great depravation of mind, and a monſtrous alienation from God and goodneſs in the perſon that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of theſe three degrees now mentioned, are moſt certainly *not doers of righteouſneſs*, and conſequently it is *manifeſt* that they are not *the children of God*.

In the *ſecond* place, I ſhall enquire who they are, that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be

be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs*. In ſhort, they who in the general courſe of their lives do keep the Commandments of God. And thus the *Scripture* generally expreſſeth this matter, by *keeping the commandments of God*, and by *having reſpect to all his commandments*, by *obedience to the Goſpel of Chriſt*, by being *holy in all manner of converſation*; by *abſtaining from all kind of evil*, by *cleanſing our ſelves from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit*, and by *practiſing holineſs in the fear of God*: To which I ſhall add the deſcription which St. *Luke* gives us of the *righteouſneſs* of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, Luk. 1. 6, *They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs*. All which expreſſions do plainly ſignifie the actual conformity of our lives and actions, in the general courſe and tenour of them, to the Laws and commands of God. And this implies theſe two things; That *the tenour of our lives and actions be agreeable to the Laws of God*: And that *theſe actions be done with a ſincere and upright mind*, out of regard to God and another World, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I chuſe rather to deſcribe a righteous

teous man by the actual conformity of the general courſe of his actions to the Law of God, than (as ſome have done) by a ſincere Deſire or reſolution of obedience. For a deſire may be ſincere for the time it laſts, and yet vaniſh before it come to any real effect. And how innocently ſoever it was intended, it is certainly a great miſtake in Divinity, and of very dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men, to affirm that a Deſire of grace is grace; and conſequently, by the ſame reaſon, that a deſire of obedience, is obedience. A ſincere deſire and reſolution to be good is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cheriſhed and encouraged; but yet it is far enough from being the thing deſired, or from being accepted for it in the eſteem of God: For God never accepts the Deſire for the deed, but where there is no poſſibility, no opportunity of doing the thing deſired; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reaſon to imagine that the deſire in that caſe ſhould be accepted as if the thing were done. For inſtance, If a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able, in this caſe the deſire is accepted for the deed. And of this caſe it is

and no other, that the *Apoſtle* ſpeaks, 2 *Cor.* 8. 12, *If there be firſt a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* That is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men according to the largeneſs of their hearts, and not according to the ſtraitneſs of their fortunes: But it is a great miſtake, to draw a general concluſion from this Text, that in all caſes God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man ſincerely deſire and reſolve to reform his life (as I doubt not many men often do) but do it not, when there is time and opportunity for it, theſe deſires and reſolutions are of no account with God; all this *righteouſneſs is but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which paſſeth away.* Men are not apt to miſtake ſo groſly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirſt to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and ſincerity of theſe natural deſires. No man thinks that covetouſneſs or a greedy deſire to be rich, is an eſtate; or that ambition or an inſatiable deſire of honour is really advancement: Juſt ſo, and no otherwiſe, a deſire to be good is righteouſneſs. The *Apoſtle's* caution a little before the Text may fitly be applied

plied to this purpoſe, *Little children, let no man deceive you: He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Not but that the beſt of men do ſometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by ſurpriſe, and born down by the violence of temptation; but if the general courſe of our actions be a *doing of righteouſneſs*, the grace of the Goſpel, in and through the merits of our bleſſed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect but ſincere obedience.

II. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, arrive at the certain knowledg of his ſpiritual eſtate and condition. *By this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.* By which the *Apoſtle* means, that this is a real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that whereby they very often manifeſt themſelves to others; eſpecially when the courſe of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriouſly impious and wicked. But becauſe it doth not ſo much concern us curiouſly to enquire into, much leſs ſeverely to cenſure the ſtate of other men, I ſhall only

only consider at present, how far by this mark and character every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himself to be so, if he will but consider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himself. As for those who are vicious in the general course of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of some heinous and notorious sin, not yet repented of; their case is so plain, for the most part, even to themselves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men stand continually convicted, and condemned by the sentence of their own minds: and whenever they reflect upon themselves (which they do as seldom as they can) they are *a terrour to themselves*, and full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment. Not but that, even in so plain a case, many men do use great endeavour to cheat themselves; and would be very glad to find out ways to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of Heaven, and to gain the favour, at least the forgiveness of God, without repentance and amendment of their lives. And to this end they

are

are willing to confeſs their ſins, and to undergo any Pennance that ſhall be impoſed upon them, that only excepted which only can do them good, I mean, real reformation. And when the Prieſt hath abſolv'd them, they would fain believe that God hath forgiven them too; however, they return to their former courſe, and being ſtrongly addicted to their luſts, between ſtupidity and fooliſh hopes, they at laſt come to this deſperate reſolution, to venture all upon the abſolution of the Prieſt, *Et valeat quantum valere poteſt*, let it have what effect it can; though I dare ſay, that in their moſt ſerious thoughts they are horribly afraid it will do them no good.

And for thoſe who are ſinners of a leſſer rate, and perhaps allow themſelves only in one kind of vice, they likewiſe have reaſon to conclude themſelves in a bad condition; eſpecially if they conſider that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God is guilty of all, becauſe he contemns that authority which enacted the whole Law. And 'tis eaſie for any man to diſcern the habit of any ſin in himſelf; as when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm

reſolutions againſt it, when he uſeth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it; or however, ſtill continues in the practice of it. For the cuſtomary practice of any known ſin, is utterly inconſiſtent with ſincere reſolutions and endeavours againſt it; there being no greater evidence of the inſincerity of reſolutions and endeavours in any kind, than ſtill to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewiſe, they that are ſincerely good may generally be well aſſured of their good condition, and that they are *the children of God*. And there are but two things neceſſary to evidence this to them; That the general courſe and tenour of their actions be agreeable to the Laws of God; and That they be ſincere and upright in thoſe actions. And both theſe every man may ſufficiently know concerning himſelf; for if the Laws of God be plain, and lye open to every mans underſtanding, then is it as eaſie for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his Father or his Prince, and when he keeps the known

Laws

Laws of the Land. And no ſenſible and conſiderate man ever had any doubt of this kind; for if a man can know any thing, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks a known Law; ſo that all doubts of this nature are frivolous and idle pretences to cover mens faults, and ſuch as they would be aſhamed to alledg in any other caſe.

And a good man may likewiſe know when he obeys God ſincerely. Not but that men often deceive themſelves with an opinion, or at leaſt a groundleſs hope of their own ſincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themſelves, and uſe due care and diligence, there are very few caſes (if any) wherein they may not know their own ſincerity in any act of obedience to God: For what can a man know concerning himſelf, if not the reality of his own intentions? If any man ſhould in earneſt tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendſhip for me which he made profeſſion of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and ſincere, I confeſs I ſhould doubt of it too; becauſe I ſhould certainly conclude that no man could know that matter ſo well as he himſelf. And there is no doubt but whoever hath

a hearty kindneſs for another, and a ſincere deſire to ſerve and pleaſe him, knows he has it. And accordingly good and holy men in Scripture do every where with great confidence and aſſurance appeal to God, concerning the integrity and ſincerity of their hearts towards him: *Job* and *David*, *Hezekiah* and *Nehemiah* in the *old* Teſtament; and in the *new* St. *Paul* for himſelf and *Timothy*, makes this ſolemn profeſſion of their ſincerity, 2 *Cor.* 1. 12, *Our rejoycing is this, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have our converſation in the world.* And I cannot call to mind ſo much as any one paſſage in Scripture, from whence it can be collected that any good man ever doubted of his own ſincerity: And to ſay the truth, it would not be modeſty but impudence in any man to declare that he ſuſpects himſelf of hypocriſie; good men have always abhorred the thoughts of it. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job*, and yet he could not bear to have his integrity queſtioned. It was a brave and a generous ſpeech of his, *Till I dye, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

And yet it hath ſo happened, that *this* is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been ſo unreaſon-

unreaſonably cheriſhed in it, as to have it made a conſiderable evidence of a mans ſincerity to doubt of it himſelf. It is indeed ſaid in Scripture, *Jer.* 17. 9, *That the heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked; who can know it?* which is true concerning our future intentions and actions; no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did *Hazael* think that ever he ſhould do thoſe things which the Prophet foretold him. But though this be true in it ſelf, yet 'tis not the meaning of that Text. For the Prophet in that *chapter* plainly makes uſe of this conſideration of the falſhood and deceitfulneſs of mans heart, as an argument to take off the people of *Iſrael* from *truſting in the arm of fleſh*, and in thoſe promiſes which were made to them of forreign aſſiſtance from *Egypt*: Becauſe men may pretend fair, and yet deceive thoſe that rely upon them; for *the heart of man is deceitful and deſperately wicked*, and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be anſwerable to their outward profeſſions; for *he ſearcheth the heart and tryeth the reins.* And this, I verily believe, is all that the *Prophet* here intends, That there is a great deal of fraud and deceit in the hearts of bad

men, ſo that no man can rely upon their promiſes and profeſſions; but God knows the hearts of all men. But now becauſe God alone knows the hearts of all men, and the ſincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow that it is a thing either impoſſible or very difficult for any man to know the ſincerity of his own preſent intentions and actions? To make any ſuch concluſion, were to *condemn the generation of Gods children*, thoſe holy and excellent men in Scripture, *Job*, and *David*, and *Hezekiah*, and St. *Paul*, who do ſo frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And ſurely when the *Apoſtle* ſaith, *No man knows the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man which is in him*, he plainly ſuppoſes that every man is conſcious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that I might from the very foundation deſtroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in it ſelf, but has likewiſe been a very great hindrance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us enquire whence it comes to paſs, that notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty about their ſpiritual condition. For the clearing

ing of this matter, we will distinctly consider these three things. *First*, The grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad, concerning their good condition. *Secondly*, The causeless doubts and jealousies of men really good concerning their bad condition. And *thirdly*, The just causes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriously bad, and live in the practice of known vices, these do not fall under our consideration: If they be troubled about their condition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is less than they ought to be. To persons in this condition there is only counsel to be given, to leave their sins and become better; but no comfort to be administred to them, till first they have followed that counsel: For till they reform, if they think themselves to be in a bad condition, they think just as they ought, and as there is great reason; and no body should go about to perswade them otherwise.

First then, we will consider the grounds of the false hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worst of men, but such as make some shew and appear-

ance of goodneſs. It is very unpleaſing to men to fall under the hard opinion and cenſure of others, but the moſt grievous thing in the world for a man to be condemned by himſelf; and therefore it is no wonder that men uſe all manner of ſhifts to avoid ſo great an inconvenience as is the ill opinion of a mans ſelf concerning himſelf and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profeſſion of the Chriſtian Faith and their being baptized into it. But this is ſo far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greateſt and moſt ſolemn obligation to it. Doſt thou believe the Doctrine of the Goſpel? thou of all men art inexcuſable if thou alloweſt thy ſelf in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts.

Others truſt to their external Devotion, they frequent the Church and ſerve God conſtantly, they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the bleſſed Sacrament: But let us not deceive our ſelves, God is not mocked. All this is ſo far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that on the contrary, the impiety of our lives ſpoils all the acceptance of our devotions. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law* (*that*

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is, from obeying it) *even his prayer ſhall be an abomination.*

Others, who are ſenſible they are very bad, depend very much upon their repentance, eſpecially if they ſet ſolemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a ſincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: But then it is to be conſidered, that no repentance is ſincere but that which produceth a real change and reformation in our lives. For we have not repented to purpoſe, if we return again to our ſins. It is well thou art in ſome meaſure ſenſible of thy miſcarriage, but thou art never ſafe till thou haſt forſaken thy ſins; thy eſtate and condition towards God is not chang'd, till thou haſt really alter'd thy ſelf and the courſe of thy life.

Others ſatisfie themſelves with the exerciſe of ſome particular graces and vertues, Juſtice, and Liberality, and Charity. And is it not a thouſand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not anſwerable to theſe; that thou ſhouldeſt loſe the reward of ſo much real goodneſs, out of thy fondneſs to any one vice or luſt; that when *thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*, for *lack* of one or two things more

more thou ſhouldſt fall ſhort of it? Haſt thou never heard what the Scripture ſaith, that *he who offends in one point is a tranſgreſſour of the whole Law?* To make a man a good man, all parts of goodneſs muſt concur, but any one way of wickedneſs is ſufficient to denominate a man bad.

Laſtly, Some, who are very careful of their outward carriage and converſation, but yet are conſcious to themſelves of great ſecret faults and vices, when they can find no comfort from themſelves, and the teſtimony of their own conſciences, are apt to comfort themſelves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know our ſelves to be bad, and *our own hearts do condemn us*; it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reaſon for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Truſt no body concerning thy ſelf rather than thy ſelf, becauſe no body can know thee ſo well as thou mayſt know thy ſelf.

Theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which *Job* elegantly compares to *the ſpiders web*, finely and artificially wrought, but miſerably thin and weak; ſo that we our ſelves may ſee

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through them, and if we lay the leaſt ſtreſs upon them they will break. They are but pleaſant dreams and deluſions, which whenever we are awaken'd to a ſerious conſideration of our condition by apprehenſions of approaching death and judgment, will preſently vaniſh and diſappear; ſo the ſame *holy man* tells us, *Job* 27. 8, *What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his Soul?*

Secondly, We will conſider in the next place the cauſeleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good, concerning their bad condition. For as ſome are prone beyond all reaſon to delude themſelves with vain hopes of their good condition, ſo others are apt as unreaſonably to torment themſelves with groundleſs fears and jealouſies that their eſtate is bad. And of theſe doubts there are ſeveral occaſions, the chief whereof I ſhall mention, by which we may judg of the reſt that are of the like nature.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is ſo unreaſonable, that if it were not a real cauſe of trouble to ſome perſons, it did not deſerve to be conſidered. For no man that ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe God

God and to keep his commandments, hath from Scripture the leaſt ground to ſuſpect any latent or ſecret decree of God againſt him, that ſhall work his ruin. But whatever the decrees of God be concerning the eternal ſtate of men, ſince they are ſecret to us, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And no man hath reaſon to think himſelf rejected of God, either from eternity, or in time, that does not find the marks of Reprobation in himſelf, I mean an evil heart and life. By this indeed a man may know that he is out of Gods favour for the preſent, but he hath no reaſon at all, from hence to conclude that God hath from all eternity and for ever caſt him off. That God calls him to repentance, and affords to him the ſpace and means of it, is a much plainer ſign that God is willing and ready to have mercy on him, than any thing elſe is, or can be, that God hath utterly caſt him off. And therefore for men to judg of their condition by the decrees of God which are hid from us, and not by his word which is *near us and in our hearts*, is as if a man wandring in the wide ſea, in a dark night when the heaven is all clouded about him, ſhould yet reſolve to

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ſteer his courſe by the ſtars, which he cannot ſee, but only gueſs at; and neglect the Compaſs, which is at hand and would afford him a much better and more certain direction. This therefore is to be rejected as a fond and groundleſs imagination, and which ought to trouble no body, becauſe no body doth, nor can know any thing concerning it. *Moſes* hath long ſince very well determin'd this matter, *Deut.* 29. 29, *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but thoſe things which are revealed, unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law.*

2. Good men are conſcious to themſelves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God conſiders the infirmities of our preſent ſtate, and expects no other obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this ſtate of imperfection is capable of: And provided the ſincere endeavour and general courſe of our lives be to pleaſe him and keep his Commandments, the terms of the Goſpel are ſo merciful, that our frailties ſhall not be imputed to us, ſo as to affect our main ſtate, and to make us ceaſe to be the children of God. And though

though we may be guilty of many errours and ſecret ſins which eſcape our notice and obſervation, yet it is not impoſſible for us to exerciſe ſuch a repentance for theſe as will be available for their pardon. For we have to deal with a merciful God, who is pleaſed to accept of ſuch an obedience and of ſuch a repentance as we are capable of performing. Now there is a great difference between thoſe ſins which require a particular repentance before we can hope for the pardon of them, (as all great and deliberate and preſumptuous ſins do, which are never committed without our knowledg, and are ſo far from ſlipping out of our memory, that they are continually flying in our faces, and we cannot forget them if we would) and ſins of infirmity occaſion'd by ſurpriſe and violence of temptation, through ignorance or inadvertency: For a general repentance, ſuch as we every day exerciſe in our devotions and prayers to God, may ſuffice for theſe. I ſpeak not this to hinder any from a more particular repentance of all their known failings, the more particular the better; but to remove the groundleſs fears and jealouſies of men about their main eſtate and condition. And if any ask, how I know that a general repentance will

will ſuffice for theſe kind of ſins; I anſwer, Becauſe more than this in many caſes is impoſſible; ſo that either we muſt reſt ſatisfied that God will forgive them upon theſe terms, or conclude that they ſhall not be forgiven at all, which is contrary to the whole tenour of the Scriptures: I ſay, in many caſes, more than this is impoſſible, becauſe ſins of ignorance, and thoſe common errours and frailties of human life, which *David* calls *ſecret ſins*, are not particularly known to us when they are committed, and conſequently it is impoſſible that we ſhould particularly repent of them. And therefore in this caſe there can be no doubt but that God doth accept of a general repentance, as he did from *David* when he made that humble confeſſion and prayer to him, *Pſal.* 19. 12, *Who can underſtand his errours? cleanſe thou me from ſecret ſins.*

3. They are afraid their obedience is not ſincere, becauſe it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For anſwer to this: It is plain from Scripture, that God propounds to men ſeveral motives and arguments to obedience; ſome proper to work upon their *fear*, as the threatnings of puniſhment; ſome upon their *hope*, as the promiſes

miſes of bleſſing and reward; others upon their *love*, as the mercies and forgiveneſs of God. From whence it is evident he intended they ſhould all work upon us. And accordingly the Scripture gives us inſtances in each kind. *Noah moved with fear* obeyed God in *preparing an Ark: Moſes had reſpect unto the recompence of reward: Mary Magdalen loved much.* And as it is hard to ſay, ſo it is not neceſſary to determine juſt how much influence and no more each of theſe hath upon us: It is very well if men be reclaimed from their ſins and made good, by the joint force of all the conſiderations which God offers to us. To be ſure, Love is the nobleſt and moſt generous principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the firſt and faſteſt hold of us, and in times of violent temptation is perhaps the beſt argument to keep, even the beſt of men, within the bounds of their duty.

4. Another cauſe of doubting in good men is, from a ſenſe of their imperfect performance of the duties of Religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at ſome times. They have many wandring thoughts in prayer and other exerciſes of devotion, and they cannot for their life keep their minds continually

tinually intent on what they are about. This we ſhould ſtrive againſt as much as we can, and that is the utmoſt we can do; but to cure this wholly is impoſſible, the infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it: And therefore no man ought to queſtion his ſincerity, becauſe he cannot do that which is impoſſible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and Religion at ſome times, this naturally proceeds from the inconſtancy of mens tempers, by reaſon of which it is not poſſible that the beſt of men ſhould be able always to maintain and keep up the ſame degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not meaſure mens ſincerity by the Tides of their affections, but by the conſtant bent of their reſolutions, and the general tenour of their life and actions.

5. Another cauſe of theſe doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reaſonable aſſurance of their good condition; ſome particular revelation from God, and extraordinary impreſſion upon their minds, to that purpoſe, which they think the Scripture means by the *teſtimony* and *ſeal* and *earneſt of the Spirit*. God

may give this when, and to whom he pleaſes; but I do not find he hath any where promiſed it. And all that the Scripture means by thoſe phraſes of the *teſtimony*, and *ſeal*, and *earneſt of the Spirit*, is to my apprehenſion no more but this, That the Holy Spirit which God beſtowed upon Chriſtians in ſo powerful and ſenſible a manner was a *ſeal* and *earneſt* of their reſurrection to eternal life, according to that plain Text, *Rom.* 8. 11, *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* But then, who they are that have the Spirit of God, is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be *led by the Spirit*, and *walk in the Spirit*, and *do not fulfil the luſts of the fleſh*, then *the Spirit of Chriſt dwelleth in us.* But this is very far from an immediate and extraordinary revelation from the Spirit of God to the minds of good men, telling them in particular that they are the children of God. I know not what peculiar favour God may ſhew to ſome, but I know no ſuch thing, nor ever yet met with any wiſe and good man that did affirm it of himſelf: And I fear that in

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moſt of thoſe who pretend to it, it is either meer fancy or groſs deluſion.

6. As for the caſe of *melancholy*, it is not a reaſonable caſe, and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power of it, are ſeldom fit to take that counſel which alone is fit to be given them; and *that* is, not to believe themſelves concerning themſelves, but to truſt the judgment of others rather than their own apprehenſions. In other caſes every man knows himſelf beſt, but a melancholy man is moſt in the dark as to himſelf. This cauſe of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied, but hard to be removed, unleſs by phyſick, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to ſay ſomething that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and ſatisfie him for the preſent; but Reaſon muſt needs ſignifie very little to thoſe perſons, the nature of whoſe diſtemper it is to turn every thing that can be ſaid for their comfort into objections againſt themſelves.

Thirdly, But beſides thoſe who miſtake their condition, either by preſuming it to be better, or fearing it to be worſe than it is; there are likewiſe others who upon good grounds are doubtful of their con-

dition, and have reaſon to be afraid of it: Thoſe I mean, who have ſome beginnings of goodneſs, which yet are very imperfect: They have good reſolutions, and do many things well; but they often fall, and are frequently pull'd back by thoſe evil inclinations and habits which are yet in a great meaſure unſubdued in them. Theſe I cannot liken better than to the *Borderers* between two Countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful Kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, ſo that it is hard to ſay whoſe ſubjects they are, and to which Prince they belong: Thus it is with many in Religion, They have pious inclinations, and have made ſome fair attempts towards goodneſs; they have begun to refrain from ſin, and to reſiſt the occaſions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are maſtered by their old luſts, and carryed off from their beſt reſolutions; and perhaps upon a little conſideration they repent and recover themſelves again; and after a while are again entangled and overcome.

Now the caſe of theſe perſons is really doubtful, both to themſelves and others. And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and ſettle-

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ment, is by all means to encourage them to go on and fortifie their good reſolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themſelves, to ſtrive againſt ſin and to reſiſt it with all their might. And according to the ſucceſs of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up and become more manifeſt: The more we grow in grace, and the ſeldomer we fall into ſin, and the more even and conſtant our obedience to God is, ſo much the greater and fuller ſatisfaction we ſhall have of our good eſtate towards God: For *the path of the juſt is as the ſhining light, which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day:* And *the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.*

I ſhall only make two or three Inferences from what hath been diſcourſed upon this Argument, and ſo conclude.

1. From hence we learn the great danger of ſins of Omiſſion as well as Commiſſion; *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.* The mere neglect of any of the great duties of Religion, of piety towards God, and of kindneſs and charity to men, though we be free from the com-

miſſion of great ſins, is enough to caſt us out of the favour of God, and to ſhut us for ever out of his kingdom; *I was hungry and ye gave me no meat, thirſty, and ye gave me no drink, ſick and in priſon and ye viſited me not, therefore depart ye curſed.*

2. It is evident from what hath been ſaid, That nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any courſe of ſin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the Children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The Children of God will do the works of God, and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter will endeavour to be like him here; *Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifies himſelf, even as He is pure.*

3. You ſee what is the great mark and character of a mans good or bad condition; *whoſoever doth righteouſneſs is of God, and whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.* Here is a plain and ſenſible evidence by which every man that will deal honeſtly with himſelf may certainly know his own condition; and then according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haſte out of it. And we need not aſcend into heaven nor go down into

into the deep, to ſearch out the ſecret counſels and decrees of God; there needs no anxious enquiry whether we be of the number of Gods elect: If we daily mortifie our luſts, and grow in goodneſs, and take care to add to our faith and knowledg, temperance and patience and charity, and all other Chriſtian graces and vertues, we certainly take the beſt courſe in the world to *make our calling and election ſure*. And without this, it is impoſſible that we ſhould have any comfortable and well grounded aſſurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteouſneſs* is that into which all other ſigns and characters, which are in Scripture given of a good man, are finally reſolved: And this anſwers all thoſe various phraſes, which ſome men would make to be ſo many ſeveral and diſtinct marks of a *child of God*; As whether we have the true knowledg of God and divine illumination, for *hereby we know that we know him if we keep his commandments*: Whether we ſincerely love God, for *this is the love of God that we keep his commandments*: And whether God loves us, for *the righteous Lord loveth righteouſneſs, and*

his countenance will behold the upright. Whether we be regenerate and born of God, for *whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not:* Whether we have *the Spirit of God witneſſing with our Spirits that we are the children of God*, for *as many as have the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit*, and *by the Spirit do mortifie the deeds of the fleſh:* Whether we belong to Chriſt, and have an intereſt in him or not, for *they that are Chriſts have crucified the fleſh with the affections and luſts thereof:* In a word, Whether the promiſe of heaven and eternal life belong to us, for *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*, but if we *have our fruit unto holineſs, the end* will be *everlaſting life.* So that you ſee at laſt, the Scripture brings all to this one mark, *viz.* holineſs and obedience to the Laws of God, or a vicious and wicked life; *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.*

Let us then deal impartially with our ſelves, and bring our lives and actions to this tryal; and never be at reſt till the matter be brought to ſome iſſue, and we have made a deliberate judg-

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ment of our condition, whether we be *the children of God* or not. And if upon a full and fair examination, our consciences give us this testimony, that by the grace of God we have *denyed ungodliness and worldly lusts*, and have *lived soberly and righteously and godly in this present world*, we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God:* But if upon the search and tryal of our ways our case appear clearly to be otherwise, or if we have just cause to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in so uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if we desire to know the way of Peace, the Scripture hath set it plainly before us, *Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well: Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* Though our case be very bad, yet it is not desperate; *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all men*

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to be embraced, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners: And he is ſtill willing to ſave us, if we be but willing to leave our ſins, and to ſerve him in holineſs and righteouſneſs the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*: We who have ventured ſo long upon the brink of ruin, may yet by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace, be reſcu'd from the baſe and miſerable ſlavery of the Devil and our luſts *into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.*

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainneſs I could, to repreſent every man to himſelf, and to let him clearly ſee what his condition is towards God, and how the caſe of his ſoul and of his eternal happineſs ſtands. And I do verily believe that what I have ſaid in this matter is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up our ſelves. For *great is Truth, and mighty above all things:* She is faithful and impartial in her counſels, and though ſhe be not always welcome, yet 'tis always wiſe to hearken to her, for in great kindneſs and charity ſhe lets men know their condition and the danger of it, that they may take

care

care to prevent it: *With her is no accepting of perſons, and in her judgment there is no unrighteouſneſs.* I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a Heathen Philoſopher, *Make it no longer a matter of diſpute what are the marks and ſigns of a good man, but immediately ſet about it, and endeavour to become ſuch an one.* *Antonin.* lib. 10.

A SERMON

Preached at

WHITE-HALL

IN

LENT,

March 30th 1677.

A

SERMON

Preached at

WHITE-HALL

IN

LENT,

Luke XV. 7.

I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in Heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance.

AFTER many attempts made in vain, to reclaim ſinners from their evil ways, and to bring them to the wiſdom of the juſt, it is hard for us who are the meſſengers of God to men, not to ſit down in deſpondence, and at laſt quite to deſpair of doing good upon them. But when I conſider the infinite patience of God with ſinners, and how long *his ſpirit ſtrives with them*; why ſhould we, *we* who are ſinners our ſelves, think much to bear with ſinners, and patiently to contend with their obſtinacy and perverſeneſs? When I con-

I consider that our blessed *Saviour*, the great Preacher and Pattern of righteousness, did not give over the worst of men, nor despair of their recovery: this methinks should make us, who are *Ambassadours for Christ*, unwearied in *beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God*.

And of this we have a famous instance in this *Chapter*: The Publicans and sinners, as they had done several times before, came to hear our Saviour: He treated them very kindly, and conversed familiarly with them; at this the Pharisees were displeased, and murmured, and this unreasonable murmuring of theirs gave occasion to the three *Parables* in this *Chapter*.

In which our Saviour does at once answer the objection of the Pharisees, and give all possible encouragement to the repentance of these great sinners. He answers the Pharisees, by letting them plainly see that he was about the best work in the world, the most acceptable to God, and matter of greatest joy to all the heavenly inhabitants. Instead of a severe reproof of their uncharitableness, he offers that calmly to their consideration which ought in all reason to convince them, that he was no ways to blame for this

this familiar converſation of his with ſinners; having no other deſign upon them but to reclaim them from their vices, and to make them fit company for the beſt of men; that he was a ſpiritual Phyſitian, and therefore his proper work and employment lay among his Patients. And then, inſtead of terrifying theſe ſinners, who ſeemed to come with a good mind to be inſtructed by him, he gently inſinuates the moſt winning arguments and the greateſt encouragements to repentance by ſhewing how ready God was, after all their ſins and provocations, to receive them to his grace and favour, provided they did ſincerely repent and betake themſelves to a better courſe: And not only ſo, but that the repentance of a ſinner is great joy to the great King of the world, and to all that holy and heavenly hoſt that attend upon him.

From which method of our Saviour, in treating ſo great ſinners ſo gently, I cannot but make this obſervation, for my own uſe, as well as for others; That it is good to give, even the greateſt of ſinners, all the encouragement we can to repentance; and though men have been never ſo bad, yet if they have but this one good quality left in them, that they are

patient to be inſtructed, and content to hear good counſel, we ſhould uſe them kindly, and endeavour to recover them by the faireſt means; not ſo much upbraiding them for their having been bad, as encouraging them to become better.

To this purpoſe our Saviour uttered *three* Parables; of *the recovery of a loſt ſheep*; of *finding a loſt piece of money*; of *the return of a prodigal ſon to his father*. And though they all aim at the ſame ſcope and deſign, yet our Saviour uſeth this variety, not only to convey the ſame thing to ſeveral capacities in a more acceptable manner, one ſimilitude happening to hit one perſon, and another another; but likewiſe to inculcate ſo weighty a matter the more upon his hearers, and to fix it more deeply in their minds.

The words which I have read are the Moral or Application of the firſt *Parable*, concerning a man who had an hundred ſheep, and having loſt one, leaves the ninety and nine to go to ſeek that which was loſt; and having found it, with great joy brings it home. By which our Saviour gives us to underſtand, what joy God, and the bleſſed Spirits above,

bove, take in the converſion of a ſinner. *I ſay unto you, that likewiſe joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance.* Than which nothing could have been more proper, both to ſilence the uncharitable murmuring of the Phariſees againſt our Saviour, for converſing with publicans and ſinners to ſo good an end; and likewiſe to encourage ſinners to repent: For why ſhould the Phariſees be diſpleaſed at that, which was ſo great a pleaſure to God and the holy Angels? and what greater encouragement to repentance than this, that God is not only willing to receive the returning ſinner, but that the news of his repentance is entertained in heaven with ſo much joy, that if it be poſſible for the bleſſed Inhabitants of that place to have any thing added to their happineſs, this will be a new acceſſion to it?

There are *three* things in the words which require a very careful explication.

1. How we are to underſtand the *joy* that is *in heaven* at the converſion of a ſinner?

2. Who are here meant by the *juſt*

perſons that need no repentance?

3. With what reaſon it is here ſaid, that there is *more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons who need no repentance?*

There is ſomething of difficulty in each of theſe, which deſerves our heedful and attentive conſideration.

I. How we are to underſtand the *joy that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner?* And this (as indeed this whole paſſage of our Saviours) we are not to underſtand too ſtrictly and rigorouſly, but as ſpoken in a great meaſure after the manner of men, and by way of accommodation to our capacity, ſo far as the perſons here ſpoken of are capable of any addition to their joy and happineſs.

As it refers *to God*, it ſeems very inconſiſtent with the happineſs and perfection of the Divine nature to ſuppoſe Him really capable of joy, any more than of grief or any other paſſion. Becauſe this would be to imagine ſome new acceſſion to his pleaſure and happineſs, which being always infinite, can never have any thing added to it. And therefore we are

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to underſtand this, as it relates to God, in the ſame manner as we do infinite other paſſages of Scripture, where humane paſſions are aſcribed to him, to be ſpoken by way of condeſcenſion, and after the language and manner of the ſons of men; and to ſignifie only thus much to us, that the converſion of a ſinner is a thing highly pleaſing and acceptable to God.

As it refers to *Angels*, and other *bleſſed Spirits*, I ſee no inconvenience why it may not be underſtood more ſtrictly and literally; that they conceive a new joy at the news of a ſinners repentance, and find a freſh pleaſure and delight ſpringing up in their minds whenever they hear the joyful tydings of a ſinner reſcued from the ſlavery of the Devil, and the danger of eternal damnation; of a new member added to the Kingdom of God, that ſhall be a companion and ſharer with them in that bleſſedneſs which they enjoy. There ſeems to me to be nothing in this repugnant to the nature and happineſs of bleſſed Spirits in another world. For it is certain, that there are degrees of happineſs among the bleſſed: From whence it neceſſarily follows, that ſome of them may be happier than they are. And it is very probable, ſince the happineſs of An-

gels and good men is but finite, that those who are moſt happy do continually receive new additions to their bleſſedneſs; and that their felicity is never at a ſtand, but perpetually growing and improving to all eternity; and that as their knowledg and love do encreaſe, ſo likewiſe the capacity and cauſes of their happineſs are ſtill more and more enlarged and augmented: So that it is reaſonable enough to ſuppoſe, that there is really joy among the Angels and Spirits of juſt men made perfect, over every ſinner that repenteth.

II. Who are here meant by the *juſt perſons who need no repentance?* That our Saviour in this expreſſion gives ſome glance and reflection upon the *Phariſees* (who prided themſelves in their own righteouſneſs; and inſtead of confeſſing their ſins to God, ſtood upon their own juſtification, as if they needed no repentance) is very probable; becauſe this *Parable* was deſigned to anſwer their murmurings againſt him, for converſing with publicans and ſinners; and by the by to give a check to thoſe who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, as if they had no need of repentance. And this

this is very ſuitable to what our Saviour elſewhere ſays to them upon the like occaſion, that *the whole have no need of the Phyſitian, but the ſick*; that *he came not to call the righteous, but the ſinners to repentance.* But yet though our Saviour expreſſeth himſelf ſo as that the Phariſees might with reaſon enough apply it to themſelves, that there was more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine of *them*, who were ſo conceited of their own righteouſneſs, that they thought they had no need of repentance (for indeed our Saviour delivers himſelf ſo, as to leave room for ſuch a ſevere application) yet I think there is little doubt to be made but that he intended ſomething further; and that ſuppoſing the Phariſees were as juſt as they pretended, and were really righteous men, ſo as to ſtand in no need of ſuch a repentance as great ſinners do, yet our Saviour affirms, *there was more joy in heaven over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and nine ſuch juſt perſons.*

But are there any perſons in the world ſo juſt, as abſolutely to ſtand in need of no repentance? No, there was never any ſuch perſon in the world, him only excepted who ſaid this, our bleſſed

Saviour, *who had no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And therefore this phraſe of *needing no repentance* is to be underſtood in a qualified ſenſe, and with ſome allowance; otherwiſe our bleſſed Saviour had ſuppoſed a caſe which never was, of a great number of perfectly righteous men. And our Saviours meaning in this is ſufficiently explained in the laſt Parable of this Chapter, concerning the *prodigal Son*: Where the prodigal ſon is the *ſinner that repented*; and his elder brother, who had always obſerved and obeyed his father, he is the *juſt perſon who needed no repentance.* So that by him our Saviour plainly deſigns thoſe who being religiouſly educated and brought up in the fear of God, had never broke out into any extravagant and vicious courſe of life, and ſo in ſome ſenſe had no need of repentance, that is, of changing the whole courſe of their lives, as the prodigal ſon had. Not but that the beſt of men are guilty of many faults and infirmities, which they have too much cauſe to repent of, as our Saviour ſufficiently intimates in that *Parable*: For certainly it was no ſmall infirmity in the elder brother, to be ſo envious and to take ſo heinouſly the joyful welcome and entertainment

ment which his prodigal brother at his return found from his father: But yet this ſingle fault and ſudden ſurprize of paſſion conſidering the conſtant duty which he had paid to his father throughout the courſe of his life, did not make him ſuch a ſinner as to need ſuch a repentance as his brother did, which conſiſted in a perfect change of the whole courſe of his liſe. And of ſuch *juſt perſons* as theſe, and of ſuch a *repentance* as this, it ſeems very plain that our Saviour intended this diſcourſe.

III. But the main difficulty of all is, with what reaſon it is here ſaid that *there is more joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons which need no repentance?* Is it not better not to offend, than to ſin and repent? Is not innocence better than amendment, and the wiſdom of prevention to be preferred before that of remedy? Is it worth the while to do amiſs to make way for repentance; and is not this almoſt like *ſinning that grace may abound?* And if repentance be not better than righteouſneſs, why is there more joy in heaven over the penitent than over the righteous; nay, over one penitent ſinner, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons?

ſons? Do not the bleſſed always rejoyce moſt in that which is really beſt? Here is the difficulty; and it requires ſome care and conſideration clearly to remove it. In order to which be pleaſed to conſider theſe *three* things; which I think to be very material to the clearing of it.

1. That the ſame thing, conſidered in ſeveral reſpects, may in ſome reſpects have the advantage of another thing, and for thoſe reaſons be preferred before it, and yet not have the advantage of it abſolutely and in all reſpects. Moral compariſons are not to be exacted to a Mathematical ſtrictneſs and rigour. To this purpoſe I have obſerv'd in a former diſcourſe, that it was long ſince judiciouſly noted by *Ariſtotle*, "That moral and proverbi-"al ſpeeches are not to be taken too ſtrict-"ly, as if they were univerſally true, and "in all caſes: It is ſufficient if they be true for the moſt part, and in ſeveral reſpects which are very conſiderable. And of this nature are moſt of the *Proverbs* of *Solomon*; and whoſoever ſhall go about to make out the truth of them in all caſes, does in my opinion take a very hard task upon himſelf. But which is nearer to my purpoſe, our Saviour himſelf in the Chapter before my Text, and

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in the moral application of a Parable too, (namely that of the *unjuſt ſteward*) uſeth a proverbial ſpeech juſt in the ſame manner; *The children of this world are in their generation wiſer than the children of light:* Which is only a wiſe obſervation that is generally true, and in many reſpects, but not abſolutely, and univerſally. For ſome men have been as wiſe and diligent for the glory of God and intereſt of their ſouls, as ever any man was for this world, and for the advancement of his temporal intereſt. Of the like nature is this ſaying uſed by our Saviour, probably taken (as our Saviour did many other proverbial ſpeeches) from the *Jews*, and applied to his own purpoſe. For there are ſeveral ſayings of the *Jewiſh* Maſters much to this purpoſe: As, *Great is the dignity of penitents; Great is the vertue of them that repent, ſo that no creature may ſtand in their rank and order.* And again, *The righteous may not ſtand in the ſame place with thoſe that have repented.* Theſe I confeſs were very high ſayings, but yet very well deſigned for the encouragement of repentance. And they are not without good reaſon, as will appear if we conſider theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That the greater the difficulty

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of vertue is, ſo much the greater is the praiſe and commendation of it: And not only we our ſelves take the more joy and comfort in it, but it is more admirable and delightful to others. Now it cannot be denyed to be much more difficult to break off a vicious habit, than to go on in a good way, which we have been trained up in and always accuſtomed to. Thoſe that have been well educated have great cauſe to thank God, and to acknowledg the care of their Parents and Teachers: For piety and goodneſs are almoſt infinitely eaſier to ſuch perſons, than to thoſe who have wanted this advantage. It is happy for them they never taſted of unlawful pleaſures; if they had, they would poſſibly have drank as deep as others: It is well they were never entangled in a ſinful courſe, nor enſlaved to vicious habits, nor *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*; if they had, they might poſſibly never have been recovered out of the ſnare of the Devil. By the happineſs of a good education, and the merciful providence of God, a great part of many mens vertue conſiſts in their ignorance of vice, and their being kept out of the way of great and dangerous temptations; rather in the good cuſtoms they have been bred

bred up to, than in the deliberate choice of their wills; and rather in the happy preventions of evil, than their reſolute conſtancy in that which is good. And God, who knows what is in man, and ſees to the bottom of every man's temper and inclination, knows how far this man would have fallen, had he had the temptations of other men; and how irrecoverably perhaps, he would have been plunged in an evil courſe, had he once entered upon it. So that repentance is a very great thing; and though it be the moſt juſt, and fit, and reaſonable thing in the world, yet for all that, it deſerves great commendation, becauſe it is for the moſt part ſo very hard and difficult. And therefore, though abſolutely ſpeaking, innocence is better than repentance, yet, as the circumſtances may be, the vertue of ſome penitents may be greater than of many juſt and righteous perſons.

Secondly, There is this conſideration further to recommend repentance, that they who are reclaimed from a wicked courſe, are many times more thoroughly and zealouſly good afterwards: Their trouble and remorſe for their ſins does quicken and ſpur them on in the ways

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of vertue and goodneſs; and a lively ſenſe of their paſt errours is apt to make them more careful and conſcientious of their duty, more tender and fearful of offending God, and deſirous, if it were poſſible, to redeem their former miſcarriages by their good behaviour for the future. Their love to God is uſually more vehement, and burns with a brighter flame; *for to whomſoever much is forgiven, they will love much:* And they are commonly more zealous for the converſion of others; as being more ſenſible of the danger ſinners are in, and more apt to commiſerate their caſe, remembring that it was once their own condition, and with what difficulty they were reſcued from ſo great a danger. And for the moſt part great penitents are more free from pride and contempt of others, the conſideration of what themſelves once were, being enough to keep them humble all their days. So that penitents are many times more throughly and perfectly good, and after their recovery do in ſeveral reſpects outſtrip and excel thoſe who were never engaged in a vicious courſe of life: As a broken bone that is well ſet, is ſometimes ſtronger than it was before.

2. It

2. It will conduce alſo very much to the extenuating of this difficulty, to conſider that our Saviour does not here compare repentance with abſolute innocence and perfect righteouſneſs, but with the imperfect obedience of good men, who are guilty of many ſins and infirmities; but yet upon account of the general courſe and tenour of their lives are, by the mercy and favour of the Goſpel, eſteemed juſt and righteous perſons, and for the merits and perfect obedience of our bleſſed Saviour ſo accepted by God. Now this alters the caſe very much, and brings the penitent and this ſort of righteous perſons much nearer to one another: ſo that in comparing them together, the true penitent may in ſome caſes, and in ſome reſpects, have the advantage of the righteous, and deſerve upon ſome accounts to be prefer'd before him.

3. Which is principally to be conſidered for the full clearing of this difficulty; this paſſage of our Saviours is to be underſtood as ſpoken very much after the manner of men, and ſuitably to the nature of humane paſſions, and the uſual occaſions of moving them. We are apt to be exceedingly affected with the obtaining of what we did not hope for, and much more

more with the regaining of what we looked upon as loſt and deſperate. Whatever be the reaſon of it, ſuch is the nature of man, that we are not ſo ſenſibly moved at the continuance of a good which we have long poſſeſt, as at the recovery of it after it was loſt and gone from us. And the reaſons of a judicious value and eſteem of a ſettled pleaſure and contentment are one thing, and the cauſes of ſudden joy and tranſport another. A continued courſe of goodneſs may in it ſelf be more valuable, and yet repentance after a great fall and long wandrings may be much more moving and ſurprizing. For where things are conſtant and keep in the ſame tenour, they are not apt in their nature to give any new and ſudden occaſion of joy. And this is the reaſon given in the *Parable* of the *Prodigal Son*; where the Father tells his eldeſt Son, who was ſo offended at the joyful reception and welcome of his prodigal Brother, That *He had been always with him, and all that he had was his*; That is, he was ſenſible of his conſtant duty and obedience, than which nothing could have been more acceptable; and that it had not, nor ſhould not loſe its reward: But the return of his

his other ſon, after he had given over all hopes of him, and looked upon his caſe as deſperate, this was a marvellous ſurpriſe, and a happineſs beyond expectation; which is the proper and natural cauſe of joy and gladneſs: And therefore he tells him, that upon ſuch an occaſion *it was meet that we ſhould make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; was loſt, and is found.* His elder ſons continuance in his duty was the enjoyment of what he had always had; but the return of his prodigal ſon was the retrieving of what he had given up for loſt, and a kind of reſurrection from the dead. And thus our bleſſed Saviour to encourage the repentance of ſinners, repreſents God after the manner of men; as if our heavenly father did conceive ſuch a joy upon the repentance of a ſinner, as earthly parents are wont to do upon the return of a wild and extravagant ſon to himſelf and his duty.

Having thus as briefly and clearly as I could explained the ſeveral difficulties in the Text, I ſhall now deduce ſome Inferences from it, and ſo conclude.

1. *Firſt*, That the bleſſed Spirits above have ſome knowledg of the affairs of men

here below, becauſe they are ſaid to rejoyce at the converſion of a ſinner. This is ſpoken more particularly of the *Angels*, as appears by comparing what is more generally ſaid in the Text, that there is joy *in heaven*, with what is more particularly expreſs'd in the 10*th verſe*, that there is joy *in the preſence of the Angels* over one ſinner that repenteth. Now whether the Angels come to this knowledg by vertue of their miniſtry here below, for the good of the Elect; and ſo in their continual entercourſe between heaven and earth, bring to their fellow-ſervants in heaven the joyful news of the repentance of ſinners upon earth: or whether God be pleaſed from time to time to reveal it to them, as a thing extreamly welcom and delightful to good ſpirits, and tending to the increaſe of their happineſs; as it is not very material to enquire, ſo perhaps impoſſible for us to determine.

However, it cannot from hence be concluded that the Angels or Saints in Heaven have ſuch an univerſal knowledg of our condition and affairs, as to be a reaſonable ground and warrant to us to pray to them, yea or to deſire them to pray for us; no, though this were done without any ſolemn circumſtances of Invocation.

vocation. For they may very well know ſome things concering us, wherein their own comfort and happineſs is likewiſe concerned, and yet be ignorant of all the reſt of our affairs. This one thing we are ſure they know, becauſe our Saviour hath told us ſo; but we are ſure of no more. And there is neither equal reaſon for their knowledg of our other concernments, nor is there any revelation in Scripture to that purpoſe.

2. *Secondly*, If God and the bleſſed Spirits above rejoyce at the converſion of a ſinner, ſo ſhould we too: and not fret and murmur as the Phariſees here did. This is the temper of the Devil, and of very bad men, to regret and envy the good and happineſs of others. For it is reaſonable to believe, that proportionably to the *joy* that is in heaven at the repentance of a ſinner, is the *grief* and vexation of the Devil and his inſtruments, of evil Spirits and wicked men. And as the Devil delights in deſtroying ſouls, and *goes about like a roaring lion, ſeeking whom he may devour*; ſo no doubt he is in great rage, and gnaſheth out of very diſcontent, when at any time he is fruſtrated of his hopes, and the prey, which he thought himſelf ſure of, is ſnatched

out of his jaws. And thus we ſee it is with bad men, they do perſecute thoſe that forſake them and their wicked ways, and refuſe any further to go along with them *to the ſame exceſs of riot.*

And this is no where more viſible than among thoſe of the Church of *Rome.* How full of wrath and indignation are they againſt thoſe who out of pure conviction of the errours and corruptions of their Church come over to Ours? How do they perſecute them with ſlanders and reproaches, and with all the effects of hatred and malice? So that many times they can ſcarce refrain from doing them a real miſchief, even where it is dangerous to themſelves to attempt it: As if they envied them the grace of God, and the opportunity of being ſaved.

I know it is too natural to thoſe of all Communions to be eager and fierce againſt thoſe that deſert them: And yet ſuppoſing they had the truth certainly on their ſide (which they cannot all have), I ſee no great reaſon for this temper and carriage; For why ſhould I caſt away my patience and my charity becauſe another man hath made ſhipwrack of his faith? But I do not remember any where among mankind to have obſerved a more implacable

cable malice, a more ſincere and hearty ill-will, than they of the Church of *Rome* do conſtantly expreſs towards thoſe that forſake them; nay, though they give never ſo modeſt and reaſonable an account of their change, and behave themſelves towards their old friends with all the kindneſs and compaſſion in the world: yet their hatred and indignation againſt them runs ſo high, that one may plainly ſee they would ſooner forgive a man the greateſt ſins that humane nature can be guilty of, and the breach of all the ten Commandments, than this one Crime, of leaving their Church, that is in truth, of growing wiſer and better.

3. *Thirdly*, The conſideration of what hath been ſaid ſhould mightily inflame our zeal, and quicken our induſtry and diligence for the converſion of ſinners. For if the converſion of one ſoul be worth ſo much labour and pains, and matter of ſuch joy to the bleſſed God and good Spirits; what pains ſhould not we take in ſo corrupt and degenerate an Age as this of ours; where impenitent ſinners do ſo much abound, and the juſt are almoſt failed from among the children of men?

Our bleſſed Saviour indeed (according to the extraordinary decency of all his

Parables) puts the caſe very charitably, and lays the ſuppoſition quite on the other ſide: If there were but one ſinner in the world, or but one of an hundred, yet we ſhould very zealouſly intend, and with all our might, the reduction of this one loſt ſheep; and ſhould never be at reſt, till this ſingle wandring ſoul were found and ſaved. But God knows this is not our caſe, but quite otherwiſe: which ſhould quicken our endeavours ſo much the more, and make us beſtir our ſelves to the utmoſt; having always in our minds that admirable ſaying of St. *James*, *he that converteth a ſinner from the error of his way, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death.* He that knows the value of an immortal ſoul, and how fearful a thing it is to periſh everlaſtingly, can think no pains too much to take to *ſave a ſoul from death.*

4. *Laſtly*, What an argument and encouragement is here to repentance, even to the greateſt of ſinners? They, I am ſure, ſtand moſt in need of it: And though they of all others have the leaſt reaſon to look for mercy, yet they ſhall not be refuſed; though they be like the *Publicans* and *Heathens* among the *Jews*, who were not only reputed, but many times

times really were the worſt of men; though like the *prodigal ſon* here in the Parable, they have run away from their father, and *waſted their eſtate in* lewd and *riotous courſes*; yet whenever *they come to themſelves*, and are willing to return to their father, to acknowledg their folly and repent of it, he is ready to receive them; nay, much more ready to receive them than they can be to come to him: For when the Prodigal was but coming towards his father, and *was yet afar off*, *the father runs to meet him*, and embraceth him with as much kindneſs as if he had never offended him, and entertains him with more joy than if he had always continued with him.

How does the great God condeſcend to encourage our repentance; repreſenting himſelf and all the bleſſed company of heaven as tranſported with joy at the converſion of a ſinner, and almoſt ſetting a greater value upon repentance than even upon innocence it ſelf? And if our heavenly Father, who hath been ſo infinitely offended, and ſo highly provoked by us beyond all patience, be ſo ready, ſo forward, ſo glad to receive us, and there be no hindrance, no difficulty, no diſcouragement on his part; is it poſſible

after all this, that we can be ſuch fools, and ſuch enemies to our ſelves, as to be backward to our own happineſs! All of us, the beſt of us, have too much cauſe for repentance; and I fear too many of us ſtand in need of that repentance intended by our Saviour in the Text, which conſiſts in the change of our whole lives.

But I will not upbraid you with your faults; having no deſign to provoke, but only to perſwade men. I leave it to every ones conſcience to tell him, how great a ſinner, how grievous an offender he hath been. God knows we take no pleaſure in mentioning the ſins of men, but only in their amendment; and we would if it were poſſible even without minding them how bad they have been perſwade and encourage them to be better.

It is but a ſmall conſideration to tell you, how much it would chear and comfort our hearts, and quicken our zeal and induſtry for the ſalvation of ſouls, to ſee ſome fruit of our labours; that all our pains are not loſt, and that all the good counſel that is from hence tendered to you is not like rain falling upon the rocks, and ſhowers upon the ſands.

But

But I have much greater conſiderations to offer to you; that your Repentance will at once rejoyce the heart of God, and Angels, and men: that it is a returning to a right mind, and the reſtoring of you to your ſelves, to the eaſe and peace of your own conſciences, and to a capacity of being everlaſtingly happy: that it is to take pity upon your ſelves and your poor immortal ſouls; and to take due care to prevent, that which is to be dreaded above all things, the being miſerable for ever: and laſt of all, That if you will not repent now, the time will certainly come, and that perhaps in this life, when you ſhall ſee the greateſt need of repentance, and yet perhaps with miſerable *Eſau find no place for it, though you ſeek it carefully with tears*; when you *ſhall cry, Lord, Lord, and the door ſhall be ſhut againſt you*; *and ſhall ſeek to enter, but ſhall not be able* To be ſure in the other World you ſhall eternally repent to no purpoſe; and be continually lamenting your wretched condition without hopes of remedy; For *there ſhall be weeping and wailing* without effect, without intermiſſion, and without end.

And what cauſe have we to thank God that this is not yet our caſe; that we are yet

yet on this ſide the pit of deſtruction and the gulf of deſpair? O the infinite patience and boundleſs goodneſs of God to ſinners! With what clemency hath he ſpared us, and *ſuffered our manners* thus long? and with what kindneſs and concernment does he ſtill call upon us to leave our ſins and to return to him; as if in ſo doing we ſhould make him happy, and not our ſelves? With what earneſt longings and deſires does he wait and wiſh for our repentance, ſaying, *O that there were ſuch a heart in them! O that they would hearken unto my voice! When ſhall it once be?* Thus God is repreſented in *Scripture* as patiently attending and liſtening what effect his admonitions and counſels, his reproofs and threatnings will have upon ſinners, *Jer.* 8. 6, *I hearkened and I heard, but they ſpake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedneſs, ſaying, what have I done? every one turned to his courſe, as the horſe ruſheth into the battel.*

And is not this our caſe? God hath long waited for our repentance; and once a year we ſolemnly pretend to ſet about it: But many of us hitherto, I fear, inſtead of returning to God, have but more blindly and furiouſly run on in our courſe, *like the horſe that hath no underſtanding*; yea,

yea, in this more brutiſh than the Beaſt, that he ruſheth into the battel without any conſideration of death or danger, and deſtroys himſelf without a ſyllogiſm: But we ſinners have Reaſon, and yet are mad; the greateſt part of evil-doers are ſufficiently ſenſible of the danger of their courſe, and convinced that eternal miſery and ruin will be the end of it; and yet, I know not how, they make a ſhift upon one pretence or other to diſcourſe and reaſon themſelves into it.

But becauſe *the word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than a two-edged ſword*, and comes with a greater weight and force upon the minds of men than any humane perſwaſion whatſoever; I will conclude all with thoſe ſhort and ſerious counſels and exhortations of God to ſinners by his holy Prophets.

Conſider and ſhew your ſelves men, O ye tranſgreſſors: Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul depart from thee: ſeek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near: Repent and turn your ſelves from all your tranſgreſſions, ſo iniquity ſhall not be your ruin.

A SER-

A SERMON Concerning the SIN Againſt the HOLY GHOST.

Matth XII. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men:

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the ſon of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: But whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

THE occaſion of theſe words of our bleſſed Saviour was the blaſphemy of the *Phariſees* againſt that divine power by which he wrought his miracles, and particularly did caſt out Devils. Which works of his, though they were

were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet they obſtinately and maliciouſly imputed them to the power of the Devil. Upon which our Saviour takes occaſion to declare the danger of this ſin, which he calls *blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt*: and tells them, that this was ſo great a ſin above all others, that it is in a peculiar manner unpardonable. *Wherefore I ſay unto you*, &c.

For the explaining of theſe words, and the nature and unpardonableneſs of this ſin, we will enquire into theſe four things:

Firſt, What is the difference between ſpeaking againſt the Son of Man, and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

Secondly, Wherein the Nature of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt.

Thirdly, In what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly unpardonable. And

Fourthly, Upon what account it is ſo.

1. What is the difference between *ſpeaking againſt the ſon of man and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. The reaſon of this enquiry is, becauſe the Text plainly puts a great difference between them, though it be not obvious to diſcern where it lies. For our Saviour tells us,

that *whoſoever ſpeaks a word againſt the ſon of man, it ſhall be forgiven him, but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt it ſhall never be forgiven him:* And yet this blaſphemy of the Phariſees againſt the Holy Ghoſt was a ſpeaking againſt the Son of man. For to ſay that he caſt out Devils by the power of the Devil, though it was a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt by whoſe power he wrought theſe miracles, yet it was likewiſe a blaſpheming of Chriſt himſelf; and was in effect to ſay, that he was no true Prophet, nor did come from God, but was a Magician and Impoſtor.

For the removing of this difficulty I ſhall not need to ſay, as ſome learned men have done, That by *the ſon of man* is here to be underſtood any man, and that our Saviour is not particularly deſigned by it. That ſeems very hard, when our Saviour is ſo frequently in the Goſpel called *the ſon of man.* And eſpecially when St. *Luke* reciting theſe words, does immediately before give him this very title, to put the matter out of all doubt, *Luke* 12. 8, 9, 10, *Alſo I ſay unto you, whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him ſhall the Son of man alſo confeſs before the Angels of God: But he that de-*

nieth me before men, ſhall be denied before the Angels of God. Upon which it follows, *And whoſoever ſhall ſpeak a word againſt the ſon of man it ſhall be forgiven him.* So that in all reaſon the Son of man is the very ſame perſon that had this Title given him in the foregoing words, *viz.* our bleſſed Saviour. So that I take it for granted, that by ſpeaking againſt the ſon of man, is here meant ſpeaking againſt Chriſt: And by ſpeaking againſt him, as it is oppoſed to ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is meant all thoſe reproaches and contumelies which they caſt upon our Saviours perſon, without reflecting upon that divine power which he teſtified by his miracles. As, their reproaching him with the meanneſs of his birth, *Is not this the Carpenters ſon?* with the place of it (as they ſuppoſed) *out of Galilee ariſeth no Prophet:* Their reflecting upon his life, ſaying that he was *a wine-bibber and a glutton, a friend of publicans and ſinners*; with many other calumnies which they maliciouſly caſt upon him.

But by ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt is meant their blaſpheming and reproaching that divine power whereby he wrought his miracles: which though it did at laſt likewiſe reflect upon our Saviours perſon,

ſon, yet it was an immediate reflection upon the Holy Ghoſt, and a blaſpheming of him; and therefore it is called ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt by way of diſtinction or oppoſition to the other calumnies which they uſed againſt our Saviour; which were proper blaſphemies and reproaches of his Perſon, but not of the Holy Ghoſt alſo, as this was. This ſeems to me to be the true difference here intended by our Saviour between *ſpeaking againſt the Son of man, and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt*. Let us in the

II. *Second* place, enquire wherein the *Nature* of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt. And the true Nature of this ſin, though it be ſo plainly to be gathered from our Saviours deſcription of it, yet I know not how a great many learned men have made a hard ſhift to miſtake it. Some have made it to be *final Impenitency*, becauſe that is unpardonable. But why that rather than any thing elſe that is bad ſhould be called a blaſpheming of the Holy Ghoſt, it is hard to give a reaſon. Others have placed the nature of it in *a wilful and malicious oppoſition of the truth:* which though it be a great ſin, and included in the ſin here ſpoken of, or a concomitant

of it; yet is there great reaſon to believe that this is not all that is here meant by it. Others would have it to conſiſt in a malicious oppoſition of the Truth, *when men know and are convinced that it is the Truth*, which is a great ſin indeed, if ever any man were guilty of it; but it is a great Queſtion whether humane nature be capable of it. And to mention no more, others think it to conſiſt in a renouncing of the truth *for fear of ſuffering*; which made *Francis Spira* to think that he had committed this ſin.

But with all due reſpect to the judgment of others, I cannot think that any of theſe is the ſin our Saviour here deſcribes. As I ſhall endeavour plainly to ſhew, by conſidering the occaſion of our Saviours mentioning of it; the perſons upon whom our Saviour chargeth this ſin; and upon what account he chargeth them with it.

At the 22 *ver.* of this *Chapter* there was brought to our Saviour *one poſſeſſed with a Devil blind and dumb, and he healed him.* Upon this *the people were amazed, and ſaid, is not this the ſon of David?* that is, the Meſſias. The Phariſees hearing this, with great bitterneſs and contempt ſaid, *This fellow doth not caſt out Devils but by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils.* Upon

on this our Saviour repreſents to them the unreaſonableneſs of this calumny: and that upon theſe two conſiderations: *1ſt.* That it was very unlikely that the Devil ſhould lend him this power to uſe it againſt himſelf. *Every kingdom divided againſt it ſelf is brought to deſolation: and every city or houſe divided againſt it ſelf ſhall not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf, how ſhall then his kingdom ſtand?* *2dly,* Our Saviour tells them, they might with as much reaſon attribute all miracles to the Devil. There were thoſe among themſelves who caſt out Devils in the name of the God of *Abraham*, *Iſaac* and *Jacob* (as *Origen* and *Tertullian*, and *Juſtin Martyr* tell us). Of theſe our Saviour ſpeaks, and asks the Phariſees, *by what power they caſt them out.* But they aknowledged that theſe did it by the power of God: and there was no cauſe but their malice, why they ſhould not have acknowledged that he did it likewiſe by the ſame power, *ver.* 27, *If I by Beelzebub caſt out Devils, by whom do your children caſt them out? therefore they ſhall be your judges.* That is, this may be ſufficient to convince you malice of to me: *But if I caſt out Devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you*; That

is, the Meſſias is come: Becauſe he wrought theſe and other miracles to prove that he was the Meſſias. And then it follows, *Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men, but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men.*

So that the *Phariſees* are the perſons charged with this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt. And their blaſphemy was plainly this, that when he caſt out Devils by the Spirit of God, they ſaid he did it by the power of the Devil: they maliciouſly aſcribed theſe works of the Holy Ghoſt to the Devil.

And that this is the ground why our Saviour chargeth them with this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt is yet more plain from St. *Mark*, *Mark* 3. 28, 29, 30, *Verily I ſay unto you, all ſins ſhall be forgiven unto the ſons of men, and blaſphemies wherewith ſoever they ſhall blaſpheme: but he that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation: becauſe they ſaid he hath an unclean Spirit.* That is, becauſe the Phariſees charged him to be a Magician, and to have a familiar Spirit, by whoſe aſſiſtance he did thoſe works, when in truth he did them by the Spirit of God, therefore our Saviour declares them guilty

guilty of this ſin of blaſpheming the Holy Ghoſt, which ſhould never be forgiven.

So that the nature of this ſin did conſiſt in a moſt malicious oppoſition to the utmoſt evidence that could be given to the truth of any Religion. Our bleſſed Saviour to ſhew that he was ſent by God, and came from him, wrought miracles, ſuch as did plainly evidence a divine power and preſence accompanying of him. For in St. *Luke* he is ſaid to do them *by the finger of God*, Luke 11.20, *By the finger of God*, that is, to do ſuch things as were an undeniable evidence of the divine power and preſence. And this is the utmoſt teſtimony that God ever gave to any perſon that was ſent by him. And the Phariſees were eye-witneſſes of thoſe miracles which our Saviour wrought, ſo that they could not deny them: Yet ſuch was their oppoſition to him and his doctrine, that, though they ſaw theſe things done by him, and could not deny the reality of them, yet rather than they would own him to be the *Meſſias*, and his Doctrine to come from God, they moſt maliciouſly and unreaſonably aſcribed them to the power of the Devil. And this was the blaſphemy which they were guilty of againſt the Holy Ghoſt. And herein lay the greatneſs of their ſin, in reſiſting the e-

videnc of thoſe miracles which were ſo plainly wrought by the Holy Ghoſt; and which though themſelves ſaw, yet they maliciouſly imputed them to the Devil, rather than they would be convinced by them. And this is ſo very plain, that hardly any man that conſiders our Saviours diſcourſe upon this occaſion can otherwiſe determine the nature of this ſin; eſpecially if he do but attend to thoſe remarkable words which I cited before (*Mark* 3. 29,) *but he that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation; becauſe they ſaid he hath an unclean ſpirit.* I come now to the

III. *Third* thing I propounded, *namely*, in what ſenſe this ſin is here ſaid to be peculiarly *unpardonable?* For this our Saviour poſitively affirms to be in this different from all other ſins, that it is capable of no pardon: *I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men:* And to ſhew what he means by the not forgiving of it, he tells us, that eternal puniſhment ſhall follow it in the other World. *Whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the ſon of man it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt it ſhall never be*

for-

forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. Which St. *Mark* expreſſeth more plainly; that it ſhall bring thoſe who are guilty of it to *eternal damnation*, *Mark* 3. 29, *He that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt hath never forgiveneſs, but is liable to eternal damnation.* So that when our Saviour ſays, *it ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come*, he does not intend to inſinuate that ſome ſins which are not forgiven in this world, may be forgiven in the other: but in theſe words he either alludes to the opinion of the *Jews* concerning the effect of the higheſt excommunication, the ſentence whereof they held not to be reverſible, neither in this world nor the other; or elſe the reaſon of this expreſſion may probably be to meet with a common and falſe opinion amongſt the *Jews*, which was, that ſome ſins which are not pardoned to men in this life, may by ſacrifices be expiated in the other; and therefore he ſays it ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this world nor the other. And St. *Mark* moreplainly, that thoſe who are guilty of it ſhall *never have forgiveneſs*, but *be liable to eternal damnation.* So that our Saviour's meaning ſeems plainly to be this, that this ſin is altogether incapable of forgiveneſs. I know

ſome

ſome have endeavoured to mollifie this matter, but (I think) without ſufficient reaſon. *Grotius* underſtands the words *comparatively*, that any ſort of ſin ſhall ſooner be forgiven than this againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and that our Saviour only intended to expreſs the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of this ſin above others; in which reſpect the pardon of it would be more difficult than of any other ſin; but yet that the caſe of ſuch a perſon is not abſolutely deſperate: But if our Saviour had intended to ſay that this ſin was abſolutely unpardonable, I would fain know how could he have expreſſed the matter in higher fuller words? Dr. *Hammond* mollifies the words another way; that this ſin ſhall never be pardoned but upon a *particular repentance* for it: As if our Saviour's meaning was, that a general repentance, which was ſufficient for ſins of Ignorance, would not be ſufficient in this caſe, but there muſt be a particular repentance for it, without which it would never be pardoned. But this is by no means agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's diſcourſe: Becauſe he plainly intends to difference this from all other ſorts of ſins, I ſay unto you, *all manner of ſin and blaſphemy*, ſhall be forgiven unto men. But according to this inter-

terpretation our Saviour muſt mean, that all other ſins would be forgiven upon a general repentance; which is not true, for there are many other ſins beſides ſins of Ignorance; there are wilful and heinous ſins, ſuch as wilful murder and adultery and blaſphemy, (that only excepted which is againſt the *Holy Ghoſt*) and the like groſs ſins, which all Divines hold ſhall not be forgiven, but upon a *particular repentance*. So that this interpretation does not ſufficiently difference this ſin from all other ſorts of ſins, which yet it is very plain our Saviour intended to do. It remains then that theſe words muſt in all reaſon be underſtood abſolutely; that the perſons that are guilty of this great ſin ſhall never have it forgiven to them. And it may be this will not ſeem ſo harſh, when we have conſidered in the

IV. *Fourth* place, *how* it comes to paſs that this ſin is above all others incapable of pardon: And that, upon theſe two accounts.

Firſt, Becauſe by this ſin men reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their conviction. What can God be imagined to do more to convince a man of a Divine Revelation, or of the truth of any Doctrine or meſſage that comes from him,

him, than to work miracles to this purpoſe? And what greater aſſurance can men have that miracles are wrought, than to be eye-witneſſes of them themſelves? And if men will reſiſt ſuch evidence, what can God do more for their ſatisfaction? If when men ſee plain miracles wrought, they will ſay that it is not the power of God that does them, but the power of the Devil: And if when men ſee the Devils caſt out, they will ſay that the Devil conſpires againſt himſelf, this is to outface the Sun at Noon-day, and there is no way left to convince ſuch perverſe perſons of the truth of any Divine Revelation. So that there is no remedy, but ſuch perſons muſt continue in their oppoſition to the truth. For this is ſuch a ſin as does in its own nature ſhut out and prevent all remedy. And he that thus perverſely and maliciouſly oppoſeth the truth, muſt upon the ſame grounds unavoidably continue in his oppoſition to it; becauſe there is nothing left to be done for his conviction, more than is already done. If God ſhould ſend a perſon immediately from heaven to him, to convince him of his errour, he can give him no greater teſtimony that he comes from God than miracles: And if when God enables that perſon to work theſe by the

power

power of his Spirit, this man will obſtinately impute them to the power of the Devil, he defeats all the imaginable means of his own conviction. So that it is no wonder if that ſin be unpardonable, which reſiſts the laſt and utmoſt means which God hath ever yet thought fit to uſe to bring men to repentance and ſalvation. And if God were willing to reveal himſelf, and the way to pardon and ſalvation to ſuch a one, he doth by this very temper and diſpoſition render himſelf incapable of being ſatisfied and convinced concerning any divine Revelation.

Secondly, Becauſe this ſin is of that high nature that God is therefore juſtly provoked to withdraw his grace from ſuch perſons; and, it is probable, reſolved ſo to do: without which grace they will continue impenitent. There is no doubt but God, if he will, can work ſo powerfully upon the minds of men by his Grace and Spirit, as to convince the moſt obſtinate: and ſuppoſing them to be convinced and repent, it cannot be denied but that they would be forgiven. And therefore, when our Saviour here ſays, they ſhall not be forgiven, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that he means, that when perſons are come to that degree of obſtinacy and malice, God

will

will (as juſtly he may) withdraw his grace from them: *His ſpirit will not ſtrive with them*, to overcome their obſtinacy; but will leave them to the byaſs of their own perverſe and malicious minds; which will ſtill engage them in a further oppoſition to the truth, and finally ſink them in perdition. So that being deſerted by God, and for want of the neceſſary help and aid of his grace (juſtly withdrawn from them) continuing finally impenitent, they become incapable of forgiveneſs both in this world and that which is to come. And there is nothing that can ſeem harſh or unreaſonable in this, to thoſe who grant (as I think all men do) that God may be ſo provoked by men as juſtly to withdraw his grace from them in this life; that grace which is neceſſary to their repentance. And ſurely if any provocation be likely to do it, this cannot be denied to be of all others the greateſt, obſtinately and maliciouſly to oppoſe the utmoſt evidence that God ever gave to the truth of any Doctrine revealed by him. And of this the *Phariſees*, who are here charged with this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, were notoriouſly guilty, in reſiſting the clear evidence of our Saviours miracles.

And thus I have done with the *four* things

things I propounded to enquire into from theſe words. *Namely*, The difference between ſpeaking againſt the Son of man, and ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt; wherein the Nature of this ſin or blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt; and in what ſenſe this ſin is ſaid to be unpardonable; and upon what account it is ſo, *Namely*, becauſe men by this ſin reſiſt their laſt remedy, and oppoſe the beſt and utmoſt means of their conviction: And becauſe it may reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that upon a provocation of this high nature God may, and is reſolved to withdraw that grace from ſuch perſons which is neceſſary to their repentance, without which their ſin remains for ever unpardonable.

All that now remains is to make this diſcourſe ſome way or other uſeful to our ſelves. And it may very well ſerve to theſe *two* purpoſes. *Firſt*, to comfort ſome very good and pious perſons who are liable to deſpair out of an apprehenſion that they have committed *this ſin*. *Secondly*, To caution others againſt the approaches to it.

1. *Firſt*, To comfort ſome very good and pious perſons, who are liable to deſpair upon an apprehenſion that they have committed this great and unpardonable ſin; and

and conſequently, are utterly incapable of ever being reſtored to the mercy and favour of God. And nothing can be more for the comfort of ſuch perſons than to underſtand aright what the nature of this ſin was, and wherein the heinouſneſs of it doth conſiſt; which I have endeavoured to manifeſt. And if this be the Nature of it which I have declared, as it ſeems very plain that it is, then I cannot ſee how any perſon *now* is likely to be in thoſe circumſtances as to be capable of committing it. And being a ſin of ſo heinous a nature, and declared by our Saviour to be abſolutely unpardonable, there is no reaſon to extend it beyond the caſe to which our Saviour applies it; which was the reſiſting of the evidence of the miracles which were wrought for the truth of Chriſtianity, by thoſe who were eye-witneſſes of them, *that is*, by thoſe who had the utmoſt aſſurance of them that humane nature is capable of. And not only a bare reſiſtance of that evidence, but with a very malicious circumſtance, ſo as to impute thoſe works which were wrought by the *Holy Ghoſt*, to the power of the *Devil*. This was the caſe of the *Phariſees*, whom our Saviour chargeth with this ſin. And no body hath warrant to extend this ſin any

further

further than this case: and without good warrant it would be the most uncharitable thing in the world to extend it any further.

That which comes nearest to it, both in the heinousness of the crime, and the unpardonableness of it, is *total Apostasie from Christianity* after the embracing of it, and full conviction of the truth of it. And this the Scripture seems to place, if not in the same rank, yet, very near to it. And of this the Apostle speaks very often in the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* under the name of *unbelief*, and *sin* by way of eminence, as being *the* great *sin* that Christians were in danger of falling into, call'd in that *Epistle* (*Heb.* 12. 1.) ἡ εὐπερίστατος ἁμαρτία, *the sin* which Christians, by reason of the *circumstances* they were then in, were especially subject to: And he parallels it with the case of the *Jews* in the wilderness, concerning whom *God sware that they should not enter into his rest, namely*, the earthly *Can[illegible]*, which was a type of *Heaven*. Chap. 3. ver. 18. And Chap. 6. ver. 4, 5, 6, more expressly. *For it is impossible that those who were once enlightned, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers*

of the world to come, if they ſhould fall away, to renew them again to repentance. Where by *impoſſible*, the leaſt that can be meant is, that it is extremely difficult for ſuch perſons to recover themſelves by repentance. And 'tis obſervable that thoſe perſons are ſaid to have been *partakers of the Holy Ghoſt*; by which is meant, that they were either endued with a power of miracles by the *Holy Ghoſt*, or were under the conviction of them as having ſeen them wrought by others. So that this Apoſtaſie may be ſaid in that reſpect to be *a ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* So likewiſe, *Chap.* 10. *ver.* 26, *If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledg of the truth* (that is, if we apoſtatize from Chriſtianity after we have embraced the profeſſion of it, as appears plainly from the ſcope of the Apoſtles diſcourſe) *there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin:* which expreſſion declares this ſin either to be unpardonable, or ſomething very like it. And at the 29. *verſ.* Thoſe perſons are ſaid to *tread under foot the Son of God, and to do deſpite unto the Spirit of Grace.* Which ſignifies that the ſin there ſpoken of is more immediately committed againſt the Holy Spirit of God. St. *Peter* likewiſe declares the great danger of this ſin, 2 *Pet.* 2. 20, *If after they have eſcaped the*

pollutions

pollutions of the world through the knowledg of the Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worſe with them than the beginning. St. *John* likewiſe ſeems to ſpeak of this ſin of *Apoſtacy*, and to call it *a ſin unto death*: Diſcouraging Chriſtians rather, from praying for thoſe who were fallen into it; which gives great ſuſpicion that he looked upon it as hardly pardonable, 1 *Joh.* 5. 16, *If any man ſee his brother ſin a ſin not unto death, he ſhall ask, and he ſhall give him life for thoſe that ſin not unto death. There is a ſin unto death; I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it.* Now that by *the ſin unto death*, the *Apoſtle* here means *Apoſtacy* from the *Chriſtian Religion* to the *Heathen Idolatry* ſeems extremely probable from what follows, *ver.* 18, *We know that whoſoever is born of God ſinneth not, but keepeth himſelf, and that wicked one toucheth him not*; that is, he preſerveth himſelf from Idolatry, which the Devil had ſeduced the world into, *ver.* 19, *And we know that we are of God; and the whole world lieth in wickedneſs,* ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, *in the wicked one*; that is, is under the power of the Devil: *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us underſtanding to know him that is true*; that is, to

diſtinguiſh between the true God and Idols. And then it follows, *this is the true God, and eternal life: Little children keep your ſelves from Idols.* Which laſt caution is a key to the underſtanding of all the reſt; and makes it very probable that the ſin unto death is Apoſtacy from Chriſtianity unto Idolatry: Otherwiſe it is hard to imagine how the laſt clauſe comes in; *Little children keep your ſelves from Idols.* And this is that ſin which of all other approacheth neareſt to this *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, which our Saviour ſpeaks of; and concerning the pardonableneſs of which the Scripture ſeems to ſpeak very doubtfully. But if it were of the ſame unpardonable nature, yet this can be no trouble to thoſe perſons I am ſpeaking of, who cannot but know themſelves to be far enough from the guilt of this ſin.

As for thoſe other ſins which by ſome are taken to be the ſins againſt the Holy Ghoſt, they are either ſuch as no man is capable of committing, as *a malicious oppoſition to the truth when I am convinced and know it to be the truth:* For this is a contradiction. Becauſe to know any thing to be the truth is to believe it to be ſo: and therefore no man can disbelieve it while he

believes

believes it to be truth. Or elſe, they are ſuch as no man can know he is guilty of in this life; as, *final impenitency*; which ſuppoſeth a man to live and die without repentance. Or elſe, ſuch as I think not good man is incident to; as, *a malicious and perverſe oppoſing of the truth after ſufficient means of conviction.* However, none of theſe are that which the Scripture deſcribes to be the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt*, as I have already ſhewn.

But ſtill there are two things which uſually trouble honeſt and well-meaning perſons; but are rather the effects of Melancholy than any reaſonable ground of trouble. Some think that every *deliberate ſin* againſt knowledg, and after conviction, is *the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* This is aknowledged to be a very great aggravation of ſin, and ſuch as calls for a great and particular repentance; but does by no means render a man incapable of forgiveneſs. Others are troubled with *blaſphemous thoughts*, and thoſe they think to be the *ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* But this is generally the meer effect of Melancholy. And the perſons that are troubled with theſe black thoughts are no ways conſenting to them; but they riſe in their minds perfectly againſt their wills, and without

any approbation of theirs: And in this caſe they are ſo far from being the unpardonable ſin, that I hope, yea and verily believe they are no ſins at all, but the meer effects of a bodily diſtemper; and no more imputed to us, than the wild and idle ravings of a man in a frenzy or a fever: And God forbid that the natural effects of a bodily diſeaſe ſhould bring guilt upon our ſouls. So that theſe perſons have reaſon enough for comfort; but the miſery is, their preſent diſtemper renders them incapable of it.

2. *Secondly*, The other Uſe I would make of this diſcourſe is, to caution men againſt the *degrees and approaches* of this ſin. For if the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt be of ſuch a high nature and ſo unpardonable, then all approaches to it are very dreadful. Such as are, *profane ſcoffing at Religion*, and the *Holy Spirit* of God which dwells in good men: *Abuſe of the holy Scriptures*, which were indited by the Spirit of God: *Perverſe Infidelity*, notwithſtanding all the evidence which we have for the Truth of Chriſtianity, and ſufficient aſſurance of the Miracles wrought for the confirmation of it, brought down to us by credible Hiſtory, though we were not eye-witneſſes of them: *Obſtinacy in a*

ſinful

ſinful and vicious courſe, notwithſtanding all the motives and arguments of the Goſpel to perſwade men to repentance. *Sinning againſt the clear conviction of our Conſciences, and the motions and ſuggeſtions of God's Holy Spirit* to the contrary: *Malicious oppoſing of the Truth*, when the Arguments for it are very plain and evident to any impartial and unprejudiced mind; and when he that oppoſeth the Truth, hath no clear ſatisfaction in his own mind to the contrary, but ſuffers himſelf to be furiouſly and headily carried on in his oppoſition to it. Theſe are all ſins of a very high nature, and of the neareſt affinity with this great and unpardonable ſin, of any that can eaſily be inſtanced in. And though God, to encourage the repentance of men, have not declared them unpardonable, yet they are great provocations; and if they be long continued in, we know not how ſoon God may withdraw his grace from us, and ſuffer us to be *hardned through the deceitfulneſs of ſin*.

Be ready then to entertain the truth of God, whenever it is fairly propounded to thee; and with ſuch evidence, as thou art willing to accept in other matters, where thou haſt no prejudice nor intereſt to the contrary. Do nothing contrary to

thy known duty, but be careful in all things to obey the convictions of thine own conſcience, and to yield to the good motions and ſuggeſtions of God's *Holy Spirit*, who works ſecretly upon the minds of men, and inſpires us many times gently with good thoughts and inclinations, and is griev'd when we do not comply with them; and after many repulſes will at laſt withdraw himſelf from us, and leave us to be aſſaulted by the temptations of the Devil, and to be hurried away by our own luſts into ruin and perdition.

A SER-

A SERMON OF CHARITY AND ALMES.

Acts X. 38.

——Who went about doing good.

WHen Almighty God deſigned the Reformation of the World, and the reſtoring of Man to the Image of God, the Pattern after which he was firſt made, he did not think it enough to give us the moſt perfect Laws of holineſs and virtue; but hath likewiſe ſet before us a living Pattern, and a familiar Example, to excite and encourage us, to go before us and ſhew us the way, and, as it were, to lead us by the hand in the obedience of thoſe Laws. Such is the Sovereign Authority of God over men, that he might, if he had pleaſed, have only given us a Law written with his own hand, as he did to the people of *Iſrael* from Mount *Sinai*: but

but ſuch is his Goodneſs, that he hath ſent a great Embaſſadour from Heaven to us, *God manifeſted in the fleſh*, to declare and interpret his will and pleaſure; and not only ſo, but to fulfil that Law himſelf, the obſervation whereof he requires of us. The bare Rules of a good life are a very dead and ineffectual thing in compariſon of a living Example, which ſhews us the poſſibility and practicableneſs of our Duty; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Religion indeed did always conſiſt in an Imitation of God, and in our reſemblance of thoſe excellencies which ſhine forth in the beſt and moſt perfect Being: but we may imitate him now with much greater eaſe and advantage, ſince God was pleaſed to become Man, on purpoſe to ſhew us how Men may become like to God. And this is one great End for which the Son of God came into the world, and *was made fleſh, and dwelt among us*, and converſed ſo long and familiarly with mankind; that in his own Perſon and Life he might give us the Example of all that holineſs and vertue which his Laws require of us. And as he was in nothing liker the Son of God than in being and doing good; ſo is he in nothing a fitter Pattern for our imita-

imitation, than in that excellent character given of him here in the Text, that *He went about doing good.*

In which words two things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, Our Saviour's great Work and Business in the world, which was, to *do good:* ὃς διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν. Who employed himself in being a benefactour to mankind. This refers more especially to his healing the bodily diseases and infirmities of men. *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil.* Intimating to us by this instance of his doing good, that he who took so much pains to rescue mens Bodies from the power and possession of the Devil, would not let their Souls remain under his tyranny. But though the Text instanceth only in one particular, yet this general expression of *doing good* comprehends all those several ways whereby he was beneficial to mankind.

Secondly, Here is his Diligence and Industry in this work, *He went about doing good*; he made it the great business and constant imployment of his life. I shall propound to you the Pattern of our Saviour in both these particulars.

I. His

1. His great Work and Buſineſs in the world was, to *do good*. The moſt pleaſant and delightful, the moſt happy and glorious work in the world. It is a work of a large extent, and of an univerſal influence; and comprehends in it all thoſe ways whereby we may be uſeful and beneficial to one another. And indeed it were pity that ſo good a thing ſhould be confined within narrow bounds and limits. It reacheth to the Souls of men, and to their Bodies; and is converſant in all thoſe ways and kinds whereby we may ſerve the Temporal or Spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote his preſent and his future happineſs. What our Bleſſed Saviour did in this kind, and we, in imitation of him, ought to do, I ſhall reduce to theſe two Heads. *Firſt*, Doing good to the Souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their ſpiritual and eternal happineſs. *Secondly*, The procuring of their Temporal good, and contributing as much as may be to their happineſs in this preſent life.

1. Doing good to the *Souls* of men, and endeavouring to promote their *ſpiritual* and *eternal* happineſs, by good Inſtruction, and by good Example.

Firſt, By good *Inſtruction*. And under Inſtruction I comprehend all the means of bring-

bringing men to the knowledg of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by inſtructing their Ignorance, and removing their Prejudices, and rectifying their Miſtakes, by Perſuaſion, and by Reproof; and by making laſting proviſion for the promoting of theſe Ends.

By inſtructing mens Ignorance. And this is a duty which every man owes to another, as he hath opportunity; but eſpecially to thoſe who are under our care and charge, our Children and Servants, and near Relations; thoſe over whom we have a ſpecial authority, and a more immediate influence. This our Bleſſed Saviour made his great work in the world, to inſtruct all ſorts of perſons in the things which concerned the Kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happineſs; by publick teaching, and by private converſation, and by taking occaſion from the common occurrences of humane life, and every object that preſented it ſelf to him, to inſtil good counſel into men, and to raiſe their minds to the conſideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great Employment, and is theirs more particularly whoſe office it is to teach others: yet every man hath private opportunities

of inſtructing others, by admoniſhing them of their duty, and by directing them to the beſt means and helps of knowledg; ſuch as are Books of Piety and Religion, with which they that are rich may furniſh thoſe who are unable to provide them for themſelves.

And then by removing mens Prejudices againſt the Truth, and rectifying their Miſtakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of thoſe with whom he had to do, being ſtrongly prejudiced againſt Him and his Doctrine by falſe Principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their Teachers. And therefore he uſed a great deal of meekneſs in inſtructing thoſe that oppoſed themſelves, and exerciſed abundance of patience in bearing with the infirmities of men, and their dulneſs and ſlowneſs of capacity to receive the Truth.

And this is great Charity, to conſider the inveterate Prejudices of men; eſpecially thoſe which are rooted in education, and which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to thoſe that have been their Teachers. And great allowance is to be given to men in this caſe, and time to bethink themſelves, and to conſider better. For no man that is in an Errour

thinks

think he is ſo: and therefore if we go violently to rend their Opinions from them, they will but hold them ſo much the faſter; but if we have patience to unrip them by degrees, they will at laſt fall in pieces of themſelves.

And when this is done, the way is open for Counſel and Perſwaſion. And this our Saviour adminiſtred in a moſt powerful and effectual manner, by encouraging men to Repentance, and by repreſenting to them the infinite advantages of obeying his Laws, and the dreadful and dangerous conſequences of breaking of them. And theſe are arguments fit to work upon mankind, becauſe there is ſomething within us that conſents to the equity and reaſonableneſs of God's Laws. So that whenever we perſwade men to their duty, how backward ſoever they may be to the practice of it, being ſtrongly addicted to a contrary courſe; yet we have this certain advantage, that we have their Conſciences and the moſt inward ſenſe of their minds on our ſide, bearing witneſs, that what we counſel and perſwade them to, is for their good.

And if need be, we muſt add Reproof to Counſel. This our Saviour did with great freedom, and ſometimes with ſharpneſs and ſeverity, according to the condition of the perſons he had to deal withal. But becauſe of his great Authority, being *a Teacher* immediately *ſent from God*, and of his intimate

knowledg of the hearts of men, he is not a pattern to us in all the circumſtances of diſcharging this duty; which, if any other, requires great prudence and diſcretion, if we intend to do good, the only end to be aimed at in it. For many are fit to be reproved, whom yet every man is not fit to reprove; and in that caſe we muſt get it done by thoſe that are fit, and great regard muſt be had to the time, and other circumſtances of doing it, ſo as it may moſt probably have its effect.

I will mention but one way of Inſtruction more, and that is, by making laſting proviſion for that purpoſe: as, by founding Schools of learning, eſpecially to teach the poor to read, which is the Key of knowledg; by building of Churches and endowing them; by buying or giving in Impropriations, or the like. Theſe are large and laſting ways of teaching and inſtructing others, which will continue when we are dead and gone; as it is ſaid of *Abel*, that *being dead, he yet ſpeaks*. And this our Saviour virtually did, by appointing his Apoſtles after he had left the World to *go and teach all Nations*, and ordering a conſtant Succeſſion of Teachers in his Church, to inſtruct men in the Chriſtian Religion, together with an honourable Maintenance for them. This we cannot do in the way that he did, who had *all power in heaven and earth*; but we may be ſubſervient to this

Deſign

Deſign in the ways that I have mentioned. Which I humbly commend to the conſideration of thoſe whom God hath bleſſed with great Eſtates, and made capable of effecting ſuch great works of Charity.

Secondly, Another way of doing good to the Souls of men is by good *Example*. And this our Bleſſed Saviour was in the utmoſt perfection. For he *fulfilled all righteouſneſs, had no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And this we ſhould endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature and imperfection of our preſent ſtate will ſuffer. For good Example is an unſpeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a ſecret power and influence upon thoſe with whom we converſe, to form them into the ſame diſpoſition and manners. It is a living Rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them ſee their faults without open reproof and upbraiding. Beſides that it adds great weight to a man's counſel and perſwaſion, when we ſee that he adviſeth nothing but what he does; nor exacts any thing from others from which he himſelf deſires to be excuſed. As, on the contrary, nothing is more cold and inſignificant, than good counſel from a bad man, one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is ſo forward to give to others.

Theſe are the ſeveral ways of doing good to the *Souls* of men; wherein we, who are

the Diſciples of the Bleſſed *Jeſus*, ought, in imitation of his Example, to exerciſe our ſelves according to our ſeveral capacities and opportunities. And this is the nobleſt Charity, and the greateſt kindneſs that can be ſhewn to humane nature; it is in the moſt excellent ſenſe, to *give eyes to the blind*, to *ſet the priſoners at liberty*, to reſcue men out of the ſaddeſt ſlavery and captivity, and to *ſave Souls from death*. And it is the moſt laſting and durable benefit; becauſe it is to do men good to all eternity.

2. The other way of being beneficial to others is, by procuring their *Temporal* good, and contributing to their happineſs in this preſent life. And this, in ſubordination to our Saviour's great deſign of bringing men to eternal Happineſs, was a great part of his buſineſs and employment in this world. He went about *healing all manner of ſickneſſes and diſeaſes*, and reſcuing the Bodies of men from the power and poſſeſſion of the Devil.

And though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was, yet we may be ſo in the uſe of ordinary means: We may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppreſſed, and do a great many acts of Charity which our Saviour, by reaſon of his poverty, could not do without a miracle: We may ſupply the neceſſities of thoſe that are in want, *feed the hungry*, and *cloath the naked*, and

and *viſit the ſick*, and miniſter to them ſuch comforts and remedies as they are not able to provide for themſelves: We may take a Child that is poor and deſtitute of all advantages of education, and bring him up in the knowledg and fear of God; and, without any great expence, put him into a way wherein, by his diligence and induſtry, he may arrive to a conſiderable fortune in the world, and be able afterwards to relieve hundreds of others. Men glory in raiſing great and magnificent Structures, and find a ſecret pleaſure to ſee Sets of their own planting to grow up and flouriſh: But ſurely it is a greater and more glorious work, to build up a Man, and to ſee a Youth of our own planting, from the ſmall beginnings and advantages we have given him, to grow up into a conſiderable fortune, to take root in the world, and to ſhoot up to ſuch a height, and ſpread his branches ſo wide, that we who firſt planted him may our ſelves find comfort and ſhelter under his ſhadow. We may many times with a ſmall liberality ſhore up a Family that is ready to fall, and ſtruggles under ſuch neceſſities, that it is not able to ſupport it ſelf. And if our minds were as great as ſometimes our eſtates are, we might do great and publick works of a general and laſting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us bleſſed.

And thoſe who are in the loweſt condition may do great good to others by their Prayers, if they themſelves be as good as they ought. For *the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* The interceſſion of thoſe who are in favour with God (as all good men are) are not vain wiſhes, but many times effectual to procure that good for others, which their own endeavours could never have effected and brought about.

I have done with the Firſt thing, The great Work and Buſineſs which our Bleſſed Saviour had to do in the world; and that was, to *do good.* I proceed to the

II. Second thing contained in the Text, Our Saviour's Diligence and induſtry in this work, *He went about doing good.* He made it the great buſineſs and conſtant employment of his life; he travelled from one place to another to ſeek out opportunities of being uſeful and beneficial to mankind. And this will fully appear, if we briefly conſider theſe following particulars.

Firſt, How unwearied our bleſſed Saviour was in doing good. He made it his only buſineſs, and ſpent his whole life in it. He was not only ready to do good to thoſe that came to him, and gave him opportunity for it, and beſought him to do it; but went himſelf from one place to another, to ſeek out objects to exerciſe his Charity upon. He

went

went to thoſe who could not, and to thoſe who would not come to him: for ſo it is written of him, *He came to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt.* He was contented to ſpend whole days in this work, to live in a crowd, and to be almoſt perpetually oppreſt with company: and when his Diſciples were moved at the rudeneſs of the people in preſſing upon him, he rebuked their impatience; and, for the pleaſure he took in doing good, made nothing of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

Secondly, If we conſider how much he denied himſelf in the chief comforts and conveniences of humane life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreſhments of nature, his meat and drink and ſleep, that he might attend this work. He was at every bodie's beck and diſpoſal, to do them good. When he was doing cures in one place, he was ſent for to another; and he either went, or ſent healing to them, and did by his word at a diſtance what he could not come in perſon to do. Nay, he was willing to deny himſelf in one of the deareſt things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of and ill ſpoken of for it. He would not refuſe to do good on the Sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for ſo doing. He knew how ſcandalous it was among

the *Jews* to keep company with Publicans and Sinners; and yet he would not decline ſo good a work, for all the ill words they gave him for it.

Thirdly, If we conſider the malicious oppoſition and ſiniſter conſtruction that his good deeds met withal. Never did ſo much goodneſs meet with ſo much enmity, *endure* ſo many affronts, and ſo much *contradiction of Sinners*. This great Benefactour of mankind was hated and perſecuted, as if he had been a publick Enemy. While he was inſtructing them in the meekeſt manner, they were ready to ſtone him for telling them the truth: and when the fame of his Miracles went abroad, though they were never ſo uſeful and beneficial to mankind, yet upon this very account they conſpire againſt him, and ſeek to take away his life. Whatever he ſaid or did, though never ſo innocent, never ſo excellent, had ſome bad interpretation put upon it; and the great and ſhining Vertues of his life were turned into Crimes and matter of accuſation. For his caſting out of Devils, he was called a Magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their vices, *a friend of Publicans and Sinners*; for his free and obliging converſation, *a wine-bibber and a glutton*. All the benefits which he did to men, and the bleſſings which he ſo liberally ſhed among the people, were conſtrued to be a deſign of Ambition

and

and Popularity, and done with an intention to move the people to Sedition, and to make himſelf a King: Enough to have diſcouraged the greateſt goodneſs, and have put a damp upon the moſt generous mind, and to make it ſick and weary of well-doing. For what more grievous, than to have all the good one does ill interpreted, and the beſt actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

And then, Laſtly, If we conſider how chearfully, notwithſtanding all this, he perſevered and continued in well-doing. It was not only his buſineſs, but his delight; *I delight* (ſays he) *to do thy will, O my God.* The pleaſure which others take in the moſt natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good; it was *his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.* He plyed this work with ſo much diligence, as if he had been afraid he ſhould have wanted time for it. *I muſt work the work of him that ſent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.* And when he was approaching towards the hardeſt and moſt unpleaſant part of his Service, but of all others the moſt beneficial to us, I mean, his Death and Sufferings, he was not at eaſe in his mind till it was done; *How am I ſtraitned,* (ſays he) *till it be accompliſhed?* And juſt before his Suffering, with what Joy and Triumph does

does he reflect upon the good he had done in his life? *Father, I have glorified thee upon earth, and have finished the work which thou hast given me to do.* What a blessed Pattern is here of diligence and industry in doing good? how fair and lovely a copy for Christians to write after?

And now that I have set it before you, it will be of excellent use to these two purposes: To shew us our Defects; and to excite us to our Duty.

I. To shew us our Defects. How does this blessed Example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it; who, instead of *going about doing good*, are perpetually intent upon doing mischief; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no understanding? And those likewise, who, though they are far from being so bad, yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good? They think it very fair to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man: but if Preachers will be so unreasonable as to require more, and will never be satisfied till they have persuaded them out of their estate, and to give to the poor till they have almost impoverish'd themselves, they desire to be excused from this importunity. But we are not so unreasonable neither. We desire to put them in mind, that to be charitable according to our power is an indispensable duty

ty of Religion: that we are commanded not only to abſtain from evil, but to do good; and that our Bleſſed Saviour hath given us the example of both; he did not only *do no ſin*, but *he went about doing good.* And upon this nice point it was, that the young rich man in the Goſpel and his Saviour parted. He had *kept the Commandments from his youth, Thou ſhalt not kill, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery, Thou ſhalt not ſteal:* he had been very careful of the negative part of Religion: But when it came to parting with his Eſtate, and *giving to the poor*, this he thought too hard a condition, and upon this he forſook our Saviour, and forfeited the Kingdom of heaven. And it is very conſiderable, and ought to be often and ſeriouſly thought upon, that our Saviour, deſcribing to us the Day of Judgment, repreſents the great Judg of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and viſiting the ſick, or for neglecting to do theſe things: Than which nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the neceſſity of doing good, in order to the obtaining of eternal Happineſs.

There are many, indeed, who do not altogether neglect the doing of this work, who yet

yet do in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other Duties and parts of Religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of Piety and Devotion in private and publick, with Prayer, and reading and hearing Sermons, and preparing themselves for the Sacrament, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or, if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their Piety and Devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of Religion come in competition, Devotion is to give way to Charity, *Mercy* being better than *Sacrifice*: that the great End of all the Duties of Religion, Prayer, and reading and hearing the Word of God, and receiving the holy Sacrament, is to dispose and excite us to do good, to make us more ready and forward to every good work: and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, upon pretence of using the means of Religion, to neglect the end of it; and because we are always preparing our selves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the Faith, and spend all their zeal and heat about some Controversies in Religion; and therefore

fore they think it but reaſonable that they ſhould be excuſed from thoſe meaner kind of Duties, becauſe they ſerve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way; as thoſe who ſerve the King in his Wars uſe to be exempted from Taxes and Offices. But do thoſe men conſider upon what kind of Duties more eſpecially, our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles lay the great weight and ſtreſs of Religion? that it is to the Meek and Merciful and Peaceable that our Saviour pronounceth Bleſſedneſs? that *pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction?* that *the wiſdom which is from above is full of mercy and good works?* Theſe are the great and weighty things of Religion, which, whatever elſe we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they conſider, that a right Faith is wholly in order to a good Life, and is of no value any farther then it hath an influence upon it? ſo that whatever other Duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuſe us from this. How much better is it to do good, to be really uſeful and beneficial to others, and how much more clearly and certainly our duty, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men Chriſtians indeed, they would be ſo much delighted and taken up with this better work, (more acceptable to God, and more profitable

ble to men) that they could not find leiſure, or, if they could, they could not find in their hearts to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at ſo great a diſtance from the life and heart of Religion, as moſt of thoſe Queſtions are which Chriſtians at this day contend and languiſh about. Were we poſſeſſed with the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, theſe would be but dry and inſipid and taſtleſs things to us, in compariſon of the bleſſed employment of doing good in a more real and ſubſtantial way. If the ſincere love of God and our neighbour were but once throughly kindled in our hearts, theſe pure and heavenly flames would in a great meaſure extinguiſh the unchriſtian heats of diſpute and contention; as Fires here below are ready to languiſh and go out, when the Sun in his full ſtrength ſhines upon them.

II. But the hardeſt part of my task is yet behind (and it is ſtrange it ſhould be ſo): And that is, to perſwade us to the imitation of this Bleſſed Example. Let us *go and do likewiſe*; *let the ſame mind be in us that was in Chriſt Jeſus*; let us tread in the ſteps of the great God and the beſt man that ever was, our Bleſſed Saviour, who *went about doing good*. Methinks the work it ſelf is of that nature, that men ſhould not need to be courted to it by perſwaſion, nor urged by importunity. The very propoſal of the thing, and the Pattern

which

which I have ſet before you, is temptation and allurement enough to a generous and well-diſpoſed mind. But yet to inflame you the more to ſo good a work, be pleaſed to dwell with me a little upon theſe following Conſiderations.

Firſt, It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ our ſelves in doing good, to extend our thoughts and care to the concernments of others, and to uſe our power and endeavours for their benefit and advantage: Becauſe it ſhews an inclination and deſire in us, to have others happy as well as our ſelves.

Thoſe who are of a narrow and envious ſpirit, of a mean and ſordid diſpoſition, love to contract themſelves within themſelves, and like the hedg-hog, to ſhoot out their quills at every one that comes near them. They take care of no body but themſelves; and fooliſhly think their own Happineſs the greater, becauſe they have it alone and to themſelves. But the nobleſt and moſt heavenly diſpoſitions think themſelves happieſt when others ſhare with them in their happineſs. Of all Beings God is the fartheſt removed from Envy; and the nearer any creature approacheth to him in bleſſedneſs, the farther is it off from this helliſh quality and diſpoſition. It is the temper of the Devil, to grudg happineſs to others; he envied that

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Man ſhould be in Paradiſe, when He was caſt out of Heaven.

Other Perfections are (as one ſays) of a more melancholick and ſolitary diſpoſition, and ſhine brighteſt when they are alone, or attained to but by a few; once make them common, and they loſe their luſtre. But it is the nature of Goodneſs, to communicate it ſelf; and the farther it ſpreads, the more glorious it is. God reckons it as one of his moſt glorious Titles, as the brighteſt Gem in his Diadem, *The Lord mighty to ſave.* He delights not to ſhew his Soveraignty in ruining the innocent, and deſtroying helpleſs creatures; but in reſcuing them out of the jaws of Hell and deſtruction. To the Devil belongs the Title of *The Deſtroyer.*

Without this quality of Goodneſs, all other Perfections would change their nature, and loſe their excellency. Great Power and Wiſdom would be terrible, and raiſe nothing but dread and ſuſpicion in us: For Power without Goodneſs would be Tyranny and Oppreſſion, and Wiſdom would become Craft and Treachery. A Being endued with Knowledg and Power, and yet wanting Goodneſs, would be nothing elſe but an irreſiſtible Evil, and an omnipotent Miſchief. We admire Knowledg, and are afraid of Power, and ſuſpect Wiſdom; but we can heartily love nothing but Goodneſs, or ſuch Perfections as

 are

are in conjunction with it. For Knowledg and Power may be in a nature moſt contrary to God's; the Devil hath theſe perfections in an excelling degree. When all is done, nothing argues a great and generous mind but only Goodneſs; which is a propenſion and diſpoſition to make others happy, and a readineſs to do them all the good offices we can.

Secondly, To do good is the moſt pleaſant employment in the World. It is natural; and whatever is ſo, is delightful. We do like our ſelves whenever we relieve the wants and diſtreſſes of others. And therefore this Vertue among all others hath peculiarly entituled it ſelf to the name of *Humanity*. We anſwer our own Nature, and obey our Reaſon, and ſhew our ſelves Men, in ſhewing Mercy to the miſerable. Whenever we conſider the evils and afflictions of others, we do with the greateſt reaſon collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our own wiſhes and deſires and expectations from others, a law and rule to our ſelves. And this is pleaſant, to follow our Nature, and to gratifie the importunate dictates of our own Reaſon. So that the benefits we do to others are not more welcom to them that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. We eaſe our own nature and bowels, whenever we help and relieve thoſe who are in want and neceſſity. As, on the contrary,

no man, that hath not deveſted himſelf of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling ſome pain in himſelf. There is no ſenſual pleaſure in the World comparable to the delight and ſatisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. This *Cato* in *Tully* boaſts of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age; *That nothing was more pleaſant to him, then the conſcience of a well-ſpent life, and the remembrance of many benefits and kindneſſes done to others.* Senſual pleaſures are not laſting, but preſently vaniſh and expire: but that is not the worſt of them, they leave a ſting behind them; as the pleaſure goes off:

——— *Succedit frigida cura*,

Sadneſs and melancholly come in the place of it, guilt and trouble and repentance follow it. But the pleaſure of doing good remains after the thing is done; the thoughts of it lie eaſy in our minds, and the reflexion upon it afterwards does for ever miniſter joy and delight to us. In a word, that frame of mind which inclines us to do good is the very temper and diſpoſition of Happineſs. *Solomon*, after all his experience of worldly pleaſures, pitcheth at laſt upon this as the greateſt felicity of humane life, and the only good uſe that is to be made of a proſperous and plentiful fortune, *Eccl.* 3. 12, *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoyce and do good in his life.* And

a greater

a greater and a wiſer than *Solomon* hath ſaid, that *it is more bleſſed to give than to receive.*

Thirdly, To employ our ſelves in doing good, is to imitate the higheſt Excellency and Perfection. It is to be like God, *who is good, and doth good*; and to be like him in that which he eſteems his greateſt glory, and that is, his Goodneſs. It is to be like the Son of God, who, when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the World, *went about doing good.* It is to be like the bleſſed Angels, whoſe great employment it is to be *miniſtring ſpirits for the good of others.* To be charitable and helpful and beneficial to others, is to be a good Angel, and a Saviour, and a God to men. And the Example of our bleſſed Saviour more eſpecially, is the great Pattern which our Religion propounds to us. And we have all the reaſon in the World to be in love with it; becauſe that very Goodneſs which it propounds to our imitation was ſo beneficial to our ſelves: when we our ſelves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the World, this ſhould mightily endear the Example to us, and make us forward to imitate that love and kindneſs to which we are indebted for ſo many bleſſings, and upon which all our hopes of happineſs do depend.

And there is this conſiderable difference between our Saviour's charity to us, and

ours to others: He did all purely for our ſakes, and for our benefit; whereas all the good we do to others is a greater good done to our ſelves. They indeed are beholden to us for the kindneſs we do them, and we to them for the opportunity of doing it. Every ignorant perſon that comes in our way to be inſtructed by us; every ſinner whom we reclaim, every poor and neceſſitous man whom we relieve, is a happy opportunity of doing good to our ſelves, and of *laying up for our ſelves a good treaſure againſt the time which is to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.* By this principle the beſt and the happieſt man that ever was, governed his life and actions, eſteeming it *a more bleſſed thing to give than to receive.*

Fourthly, This is one of the greateſt and moſt ſubſtantial Duties of Religion; and next to the love and honour which we pay to God himſelf, the moſt acceptable ſervice that we can perform to him. It is one half of the Law, and next to the firſt and great Commandment, and very like unto it: like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the neceſſity of its obligation. For *this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother alſo.* The firſt Commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the Second hath the advantage in the reality of its effects. For *our righteouſneſs*

ouſneſs extendeth not to God, we can do him no real benefit; but our charity to men is really uſeful and beneficial to them. For which reaſon God is contented, in many caſes, that the external Honour and Worſhip which by his poſitive commands he requires of us, ſhould give way to that natural duty of Love and Mercy which we owe to one another. And to ſhew how great a value he puts upon Charity, he hath made it the great teſtimony of our Love to himſelf; and for want of it rejects all other profeſſions of love to him as falſe and inſincere. *If any man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God whom he hath not ſeen?*

Fifthly, This is that which will give us the greateſt comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleaſure to men to reflect upon the great eſtates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to, becauſe they are leaving theſe things, and they will ſtand them in no ſtead in the other world; *Riches profit not in the day of wrath:* But the conſcience of well-doing will refreſh our Souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in his life? and with what confidence doth he look over into the other world,

world, where he hath provided for himſelf *bags that wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens that faileth not*? For though our eſtates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may ſend them before us, to make way for our reception into everlaſting habitations. In ſhort, works of Mercy and Charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of Judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful God a glorious recompence at the reſurrection of the juſt. Which leads me to the

Laſt conſideration I ſhall offer to you; which is, the reward of doing good both in this world and the other. If we believe God himſelf, he hath made more particular and encouraging promiſes to this grace and virtue, than to any other.

The advantages of it in This World are many and great. It is the way to derive a laſting bleſſing upon our eſtate. Acts of charity are the beſt Deeds of Settlement. We gain the prayers and bleſſings of thoſe to whom we extend our charity; and it is no ſmall thing to have *the bleſſing of them that are ready to periſh to come upon us.* For God *hears the prayers of the deſtitute; and his ear is open to their cry.* Charity is a great ſecurity to us in times of evil: and that not only

only from the ſpecial promiſe and providence of God, which are engaged to preſerve from want thoſe that relieve the neceſſities of others; but likewiſe from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others, provides a ſupply and retreat for himſelf in the day of diſtreſs: For he provokes mankind by his example, to like tenderneſs towards him; and prudently beſpeaks the commiſeration of others, againſt it comes to be his turn to ſtand in need of it. Nothing in this World makes a man more and ſurer friends than charity and bounty, and ſuch as will ſtand by us in the greateſt troubles and dangers. *For a good man* (ſays the Apoſtle) *one would even dare to die.* 'Tis excellent counſel of the Son of *Sirach*; *Lay up thy treaſure according to the Commandment of the Moſt high, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy ſtore-houſe, and it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction: It ſhall fight for thee againſt thine enemies, better than a mighty ſhield and ſtrong ſpear.* It hath ſometimes happened, that the obligation that men have laid upon others by their Charity, hath, in caſe of danger and extremity, done them more kindneſs than all the reſt of their Eſtate could do for them; and their Alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endleſs and unſpeakable Happineſs of the Next life; where the returns of doing good will be vaſtly great beyond what we can now expect or imagine! For God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himſelf; and he hath eſtate and treaſure enough to ſatisfie the greateſt obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the Truth, and Goodneſs, and Sufficiency of God for our ſecurity, that what we ſcatter and ſow in this kind, will grow up to a plentiful harveſt in the other World: and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days, will be recompenſed and crowned with the Joys and Glories of Eternity.

FINIS.